

Instruments for exchange of knowledge,  
evaluated concerning the approach to the speeding problem

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*Contribution to the conference 'Traffic Safety on Two Continents', Lisbon, Portugal, September 22-24*

## Report documentation

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## 1. Introduction

Road safety specialists, civil servants and decision makers tell us that they have a great need for exchange of experiences and expertise concerning speeding. The control of speed is still a particularly tenacious issue. It is difficult to achieve sustainable effects and an integrated approach is needed. New efforts are constantly being devoted to it, and these provide us with new knowledge. However the standard methods for exchange of information, such as reports and brochures, are hardly used, so these information media are not particularly suitable.

This makes knowledge transfer an important area of attention for traffic safety policy.

In the Netherlands, central government is responsible for the development of new knowledge and for knowledge distribution, despite the decentralisation of a major part of the road safety policy to provinces and municipalities. This decentralisation makes it all the more necessary that there should be a proper transfer of knowledge.

The government has instructed SWOV to produce a survey showing what forms of knowledge transfer are needed. This is to form the basis for a proposal for the organisation of exchange of knowledge in the area of speed control.

The product of the survey is: an evaluation of twelve forms of knowledge transfer, in consultation with people involved in the traffic safety field, and a division of responsibilities between the national and regional level, to develop those instruments for transfer of knowledge.

## 2. Approach

SWOV has chosen to hold three working meetings with policy officers and management.

The first two meetings were held with policy officers from national and local government, the police, interest groups and scientific institutions.

The first meeting was primarily an encounter between bodies at national and provincial level; the second between bodies at provincial and municipal level. The third meeting was held with senior management representatives from these same bodies.

Knowledge exchange is not seen as a 'top-down' process in which there is one group asking for knowledge and another group providing knowledge. Policy bodies themselves develop considerable expertise, and therefore also have a great deal of knowledge and experience to disseminate. Thus, those concerned are in part exchanging knowledge with each other.

During the meetings the participants were asked in writing about their requirements for knowledge and for forms of exchange of knowledge. These requirements were then discussed (partly in the plenary session and partly in small groups) and reasons for priorities were given.

SWOV has analysed the results and developed a proposal on how a structure can be created for knowledge transfer, what priorities have to be set and what level of government should take primary responsibility.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Knowledge requirements

Before dealing with the question of the forms of exchange of knowledge desired, it first has to be asked what *requirements* for knowledge exist.

At the working meetings, the findings of previous research on the setting up of speed policy were presented. Current speed projects and project plans for which subsidies are being requested were held up for examination. This research has produced the following critical conclusions:

- There is little evidence of police enforcement and infrastructural measures being combined.
- Provision of information has become bogged down in a few obvious products; there is little sign of innovation.
- Police enforcement does have an effect, but as soon as the project ends and the police withdraw, the effects disappear again.
- Private organisations are scarcely being involved.
- More government engagement is needed.

These conclusions were used to make participants extra alert to possible gaps in knowledge.

It emerged from the working meetings that the requirement for knowledge is broad and deep. The participants are very involved and very actively looking for knowledge. Those who have to implement policy themselves want to justify the need for the measures properly in the context of their own situations, and in their opinion they cannot work with blueprints. Decision makers are pressing for more knowledge than before, particularly so that they can influence road users' standards of behaviour.

The requirement for knowledge can be summarised in five themes:

1. Policy needs to be supported by *hard data* on speeding behaviour and accidents and on influencing factors; a list of possible measures and their effects is also wanted.
2. There is dissatisfaction with the present approach of the speed problem. There is a need for knowledge on a more *integrated approach* to person, vehicle and road, and a better integration of road safety interests with other interests.  
The dissatisfaction relates not only to the content of the approach but also to the process: when and how are others called in, when and how is cooperation set up. More continuity in policy is needed in order to achieve structural effects.
3. For practical applications, there is a need to be better informed about *other bodies'* projects and the experience gained from them.
4. Influence is needed from *road users and non-governmental organisations*. There is a need for knowledge on how they can be involved in policy development.



5. (Interim) *evaluations* are necessary; there is a request for support to set these up, using valid data and an appropriate methodology.

### 3.2. Cooperation

Road safety demands a great deal of cooperation between bodies such as local government, the police and interest groups, and that is particularly true for speeding. This has already emerged in the treatment of knowledge requirements.

An integrated approach, involving the cooperation of various bodies and more involvement of citizens and road users, is needed. As one of the participants said: "Anything you hear about the speeding problem is always full of references to cooperation". In that sense, one of the participants also thought it would be better not to talk of 'knowledge transfer' but of an exchange of knowledge.

One important aspect that emerged in the discussion on cooperation was the desire to reach clear, firm agreements. Many participants warned against open-endedness.

In the second working meeting there was a discussion on the importance of voluntary agreements to mark the level of cooperation built up. Against this must be set the complexity of the speeding issue, and therefore the difficulty of implementing policy. That problem area cannot be resolved by a voluntary agreement, and this underlines the fact that voluntary agreements can only be used as a confirmation of points that have already been agreed.

### 3.3. Function of forms of exchange of knowledge

In the working meetings, views were exchanged on twelve different forms for the exchange of knowledge. Participants also expressed their preferences.

In effect, there is interest in all the forms; but there is also the problem of information overload. Therefore the various forms have to be applied functionally to complement each other.

Three aims of the transfer of knowledge have been distinguished:

1. To lay down the basis for a structural approach of the problem.
2. To organise cooperation between organisations to tackle the problem.
3. To disseminate new knowledge and expertise and to support application.

This leads to the following conclusions regarding the twelve forms.

#### 3.3.1. *Basis for structured approach*

Data and ideas are needed to decide whether to go ahead on a particular matter and to determine what is to be done with it generally.

A *reference book* and an *electronic datafile* provide overviews, whereas a *periodical publication*, *study visits* and a *clearing-house* offer current information or show where further details can be obtained.

A reference book may show how to go through all the policy stages, from problem through approach to evaluation, when setting up a speeding project; or it may contain a list of measures, or cite examples of measures which have been applied.

A reference book is convenient for underpinning policy, for instance regarding the current state of affairs and developments in the problem area, and for the presentation of a list of possible measures. There is a great need for this. However the reference books on the subject of speeding which were available at the time of this research came in for a great deal of criticism. They are not seen as practically oriented.

One potential advantage that an electronic datafile has over reference books is that data and plans of approach can be revised easily. It is also easier in principle to keep data and knowledge updated.

Another advantage of an electronic datafile is that users can carry out their own operations on the tables and plans of approach. There is a great need for such a datafile, but many people do not want to give up reference books. To keep up to date with new experiences and developments, a periodical publication is useful. A periodical publication is also more able to meet the need for practical applications. Possibly a periodical publication could help to meet the expectations that reference books ought to be applicable in practice.

Study visits were not much mentioned as a form of knowledge exchange. However they can have a function in keeping people up to date on practical applications.

A clearing house or information centre, functions primarily as an address which can provide further references, where the staff knows what information is available and how to obtain it. A clearing house is needed primarily to provide the quickest possible response to the need for information on new developments. A periodical publication is much too limited for this purpose. Gathering current information is still an enormous search operation involving many people. A clearing house could perform an important role in sorting information so that it can easily be applied in practice. There is a very great need for this.

It is obvious that these sources of knowledge mentioned here should be organised on *national* level. These are services with national importance.

### 3.3.2. *Cooperation and mutual exchange of information*

The approach to speeding issues calls for cooperation between the various bodies and also for the involvement of citizens and road users. Networking and working parties are needed for this, and a missionary can play a role in achieving cooperation.

There is clearly a great need for networking. This fulfils the functions of learning from colleagues and organising cooperation. It provides more opportunity to penetrate through to the possibilities of policy, and to form a proper picture of the problems to be overcome and the experiences others have had with them. These aspects cannot be fully covered by reference books and electronic datafiles.

Working parties are necessary for reaching specific agreements. The exchange of information will be even more detailed in them because it is only when people are setting up projects themselves that they see the whole range of requirements for putting measures into effect.

'Missionary' is used to refer to an expert who can give advice, but rather than waiting to be asked 'goes the rounds' himself to tell others what knowledge is available on the subject of speeding. A missionary has a role to play in getting public bodies and officials involved in policy. This is particularly necessary when they have not themselves been working spontaneously on policy and have not requested support.

Most speed projects are set up at regional or municipal level, and so it is logical that the exchange of knowledge which takes place in networking, working parties and through a missionary, should be coordinated *regionally*.

### 3.3.3. *New knowledge and expertise*

A great deal of new knowledge and supporting expertise is required in the area of speeding.

Suitable instruments to provide this are *tailor-made advice, symposiums and courses*.

A clearing house can have the important secondary function of analysing the need for external assistance and the acquisition of new knowledge, and so to speak testing the market.

The function of tailor-made advice is primarily to improve the approach taken, e.g. when the advice is tailored to specific speeding problems or to the involvement of citizens and non-governmental organisations in policy development.

A symposium is important mainly to bring people up to date and to present possibilities for innovation. It has the secondary aim of letting people get to know each other and reinforcing networking.

A course has the function of further training and of teaching applications of a plan of approach or methods and techniques. Demand for courses was expressed mainly with regard to setting up evaluations.

The need for new knowledge and support should be determined at *regional* level, with the exception of the listing of information sources which can be done by the clearing house. The organisation of advice, symposiums and courses should be done *in collaboration with the national bodies*, since the knowledge and expertise are of national importance and are also concentrated in particular areas.

## 4. Discussion

To a large extent, the conclusions reached here relating to the exchange of information on the subject of speeding, may be extended to the whole of road safety policy.

It is conceivable that there might be a single structure for the approach to a safe and sustainable traffic system.

A more simple structure should be set up for other subject areas within road safety policy which are less complex in nature and/or where the exchange of knowledge is not such a major obstacle.

An electronic datafile and a clearing house, together with a periodical publication, should be a good basis for the exchange of information on all subjects. Other forms of knowledge exchange may be added where required.