



The double challenge of our time

Safer roads and sustainable mobility

On 18-19 November 2015, the 2nd Global High Level Conference on Road Safety was held in Brasilia, Brazil. At a special session on Safer Roads and Mobility, SWOV Managing Director Peter van der Knaap made the following statement.

“Your Excellencies, esteemed Ministers, distinguished Delegates, dear colleagues and friends.

As the excellent Global Status Report points out, sound infrastructure and mobility policy have a crucial role in reducing traffic injuries and deaths: the correct design of streets and roads helps trigger safe behaviour. Yet, in many countries the quality of roads has not kept pace with vehicle use.

We face a double challenge: to make traffic and road transport safe *AND* to make it sustainable. To achieve this, good infrastructure *AND* smart use of this infrastructure are indispensable for all road users, including children and older people.

The good news is that making traffic safer and making it more sustainable often go well together. Think, for example, of reducing speed - it helps both to save lives and to save fossil fuels.

In low and middle income countries, rightly the focus is on improving road safety. Development and new prosperity are accompanied by increasing numbers of cars and motorcycles. This can be considered a positive thing, as it does increase freedom. But it also poses serious safety problems. Here, the world can learn and benefit from the mistakes *AND* the successes of countries that went through this transition before. Again, good infrastructure for all road users, including pedestrians and cyclists, is of the essence.

In addition to safety, sustainability is the second or, for many, even the first priority in high-income countries. Take, for example, zero emission statements. In this respect, a growing number of cities across the world welcome cycling and walking as an affordable, healthy, and green mode of transport.

In the Netherlands, we have more bicycles than inhabitants. We also have the greatest number of e-bikes worldwide. Bicycles are no longer a mode of transport for ‘poor people’. Instead, they are now considered cool, responsible, sporty, and fun. And they are! In addition, they are indispensable for urban mobility.

Yet, cyclists, like pedestrians, are vulnerable. And while the Netherlands still ranks among the top five countries with the lowest numbers of road fatalities, we witness an all-time record in serious road injuries today, especially among cyclists. This presents the new challenge! The success of cycling makes it necessary to invest in better infrastructure for cyclists. And this is exactly what we are doing: together with ANWB, the Royal Dutch Touring Club, SWOV is developing a cycle path assessment program: CycleRAP. Together with ANWB and the City of Amsterdam, we are now assessing the cycle infrastructure of the bicycle capital of the world, the wonderful city of Amsterdam. The gains, both in terms of safety *AND* sustainability, will be substantial.

So let's do it: let's do what UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged us to do: we have to rethink mobility and invest in sustainable modes of transport: walking, cycling, and public transport. Not instead of cars, but smartly combined with cars. Let us make traffic and road transport not just sustainably safe, as the safe system approach teaches us, but also safe *AND* sustainable."

