



Ensuring Road Safety

This editorial is based on [“India has Still to Get A Good Grip on Road Safety”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 18/02/2022. It talks about the measures taken to ensure road safety in India and the pertaining challenges.

For Prelims: Global Conferences on Road Safety, Brasilia Declaration, Justice KS Radhakrishnan Committee, Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (2020), Motor Vehicles (MV) (Amendment) Act, 2019, iRAD (Integrated Road Accident Database) Project.

For Mains: Road Safety - India's related initiatives, challenges, steps that can be taken.

Road Safety, though extremely important, has still not been able to attract due attention in India. More than 150,000 people die every year in India while 500,000 get injured.

Although India has set impressive targets to reduce fatalities from road accidents and ensure road safety, strict implementation of laws and a dedicated enforcement manpower is still a missing component in this strategy.

As essential as it is to remain optimistic while fixing targets, the past record of road accidents and available infrastructure to deal with road safety measures in India should not be lost sight of.

Road Safety in India

Where does India stand in terms of Road Safety?

- Although a number of steps have been taken in the last decade to check road accidents, statistics published by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) show that the number of **deaths in road accidents** increased from **1,42,485 in 2011 to 1,51,113 in 2019**.
 - The Ministry is yet to publish its data for the year 2020.
- The annual publication of the **National Crime Records Bureau**, titled **Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (2020)** shows that **1,33,201 deaths were recorded in 2020** (declined as compared to 2019).
 - However, the **fatality** (number of deaths per 100 accidents) which was 26.9 in 2001, has **continued to rise from 28.63 in 2011 to 37.54 in 2020**.
 - Also, the reduction of accidents in 2020 was primarily due to the **various Covid-19 lockdowns** when only a limited number of motor vehicles were on the roads.

What are the SC Interventions in this Regard?

- The **Supreme Court of India** had set up the three-member **Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan** panel

on road safety in April 2014 which recommended the ban on the sale of alcohol on highways to restrain drunk driving.

- It also directed states to implement laws on wearing helmets.
- The committee stressed the importance of creating awareness among people on road safety rules.
- The SC in 2017, issued a number of directives with regard to road safety that, inter alia, included:
 - The **constitution of a State Road Safety Council**
 - The setting up of **road safety fund**
 - Notification of a **road safety action plan**
 - The constitution of a **district road safety committee**
 - The establishment of **trauma care centres**
 - Inclusion of **road safety education in the academic curriculum** of schools

What Other Initiatives has India Taken?

- MoRTH participated in a conference in Sweden in 2020 — the [Third High Level Global Conference on Road Safety for Achieving Global Goals 2030'](#) — where it was conceptualised to have zero road fatalities in India by 2030.
- India signed the [Brasilia declaration](#) and committed to reduction in fatalities.
 - The declaration was signed at the **Second Global High-Level conference** on Road Safety held in Brazil.
- The [Motor Vehicles \(MV\) \(Amendment\) Act, 2019](#) which hiked the penalties for traffic violations, defective vehicles, juvenile driving, etc.
 - It provides for a **Motor Vehicle Accident Fund**, which would provide compulsory insurance cover to all road users in India for certain types of accidents.
 - It also provides for a **National Road Safety Board**, to be created by the Central Government through a notification.
 - It also provides for the protection of **good samaritans**.

What are the Challenges to Ensuring Road Safety?

- **Issues with MV (Amendment) Act, 2019:** The **MV (Amendment) Act, 2019** increased the existing fines for violating traffic rules which was criticised on the pretext that the (fine) **paying capacity of an average Indian was still limited**.
 - Also, only a few cases of traffic violations are contested by the accused in a court of law.
 - Therefore, the expected impact of the deterrent provisions of the amended law could not be realised on ground.
- **Lack of Enforcement Manpower:** The enforcement manpower available is insufficient to deal with the steadily increasing volume of traffic. The **automation of processes is still in its infancy** and limited to large cities.
- **Lack of Finances:** There are **inadequate funds for the rectification of black spots** and the undertaking of traffic calming measures.
 - Though more than 60% road accidents reportedly take place because of over-speeding, **'speed limit' sign boards are rarely seen** or found even on State highways and major roads.
- **Improving Driving Skills:** Even today, getting a driving licence is not a difficult task as there is **no standard written and rigorous practical test**.
 - Many **States do not have test driving tracks**. There are no institutes for refresher training if a driving licence of a person is suspended.
- **No Stringent Enforcement of Laws:** About two-thirds of victims of road fatalities are two-wheeler drivers and pillion riders. Though the wearing of safety headgear is mandatory, it is **not enforced strictly** in all States due to a lack of strong will.
 - Even an amended provision that relates to **'Offences by Juveniles'** is not enforced strictly.
- **Unavailability of Accurate Data:** Road safety data is a **contested area** in India. The figures of death and injury from accidents are viewed as an underestimate by scholars, the Transportation Research and Injury Prevention Programme at IIT Delhi, for instance, estimates that cumulatively, **road traffic injuries** recorded by the police are **underestimated by a factor of 20**, and those that **need hospitalisation by a factor of four**.

What Steps Can Be Taken?

- **Implementation of First Tier Norms:** The transition to a professional road environment requires implementation of first-tier reforms that **deal with quality of road infrastructure, facilities for vulnerable users and zero-tolerance enforcement of rules** by a trained, professional and empowered machinery.
 - A mandatory monthly public hearing of **District Road Safety Committees involving local communities** can highlight safety concerns, and their follow-up action can then be supervised by the field experts.
- **Better Data Collection:** The **accident data collection format of the MoRTH** is essential to identify the true cause of an accident and take remedial measures.
 - Similarly, the **iRAD (Integrated Road Accident Database) Project** aims to enrich the accident database and improve road safety in the country by collecting data from different stakeholders using the iRAD mobile and web application.
 - The **integration of these projects** can bring some synergy and make the data collection procedure more user-friendly.
- **Better Centre-State Coordination:** It is a high time that we realise that lives cannot be lost at the cost of poor enforcement of traffic laws.
 - It is important for the States and the Centre to be on the same page in **improving and strengthening the infrastructure of States** by enabling more funds.
 - Merely and only fixing targets is not a pragmatic approach to reduce road accident fatalities. **Putting dedicated efforts in achieving those targets** is also required.
- **Bringing Behavioural Change:** While the strict enforcement of traffic safety laws would go a long way, **educating citizens about the impact of accidents on the kin of the victims** through public discourse could help in reducing accidents.
 - It is important that road users and people, in general, are **sensitised about the norms and spirit of road safety**.
 - Regular **road safety awareness and education programmes** should be conducted in residential areas, over the weekends, with the active assistance of the RWAs/local bodies/NGOs.

Drishti Mains Question

“Road Safety should be dealt with as a public health issue rather than a transportation issue”. Comment.