

ROAD SAFETY POLICIES IN INDIA – IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Based on the recommendations of Sunder Committee, the Union Cabinet approved National Road Safety Policy on 15th March 2010. The National Road Safety Policy specifies the guidelines for initiatives to be taken and SOPs to be designed and drafted by the Government at all levels to improve the road safety activities in the country. The Government of India further recognizes that as road accidents involve roads, motor vehicles and human beings, road safety needs to be addressed in a holistic manner. It also recognizes that regardless of jurisdiction, the Central and State Governments have a joint responsibility in reducing the incidents of road accidents, injuries and fatalities. The study is a literary one and is based on the secondary data referred from various Government Websites, journals, magazines, and newspapers, etc. This paper is an attempt to broadly examine and analyse the status of Safety Policies in India and the challenges being faced in their implementation.

Introduction

In today's world, road and transport have become an integral part of life. Everybody is a road user in one way or the other. The present transport system has cut short the distances but has increased the risk to life. Every

year road crashes result in the loss of thousands of lives and serious injuries to lacs of people.

In India itself about eighty thousand people are killed in road crashes every year which is thirteen percent of the total fatalities all over the world. Man behind the wheel plays an important role in most of the crashes. The crashes mostly occur either due to carelessness or due to lack of awareness about road safety. Hence, road safety education is as important as any other basic skills of survival.

A Committee was constituted under the Chairmanship of S. Sundar, Former Secretary (MoST) in 2005 to make recommendations on creation of a dedicated body on road safety and traffic management. The Committee was also assigned the responsibility to draft National Road Safety Policy. The Committee in its report submitted in February, 2007 recommended a draft National Road Safety Policy. Based on the recommendations this Committee, the Union Cabinet, on 15th March 2010, approved National Road Safety Policy. The National Road Safety Policy outlines the policy initiatives at all levels to improve the road safety activities in the country.

Objectives

- To identify the road safety policies and statements in India.
- To identify the challenges in implementing those policies.
- To suggest how to improve the implementation of policies.

Preamble of the Road Safety Policy

- The Government of India is deeply concerned about the rising number of road accidents, injuries and fatalities in recent years. It recognizes that road accidents have now become a major public safety issue, and the victims are mainly the poor and vulnerable road users.
- The Government of India further recognizes the need to address road safety on a holistic basis that as road accidents involve roads, motor vehicles and also the human beings. It also recognizes that regardless of jurisdictions, the Central and State Governments have

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a joint responsibility in reducing the incidence of road accidents, injuries and fatalities.

- In the light of this, the Government of India, through this National Road Safety Policy, states its commitment to reduce significantly the rate of mortality and morbidity resulting out of road accidents.

Road Safety Policy Statements

In order to achieve a significant improvement in road safety, the Government of India is committed to:

Making people Aware about Road Safety Issues

The Government would increase its efforts to promote awareness about the various aspects of road safety, the social and economic implications of road accidents and what needs to be done to curb the rising menace of road accidents. This would enable and empower the different stakeholders to play a meaningful role in promoting road safety.

Digitization of Road Safety Information

The Government will provide assistance to local bodies, Union Territories and States to improve the quality of crash investigation and of data collection, transmission and analysis. A National Road Safety Information System will be designed and implemented to provide data supported policy guidelines for road safety activities.

Providing Safer Road Infrastructure

The Government will study standards for safety while designing rural and urban roads and will implement international best practices keeping in view Indian traffic conditions. The GOI will continue with Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) under a national framework to ensure a safe and efficient transport system.

Designing Safer Vehicles for Enhanced Road Safety

The Government will intervene to ensure that safety features are built in at the stage of design, manufacture, usage, operation and maintenance of vehicles as per the international standards and practices in order to minimize road crashes.

Improving Licensing and Training for Safer Drivers

The Government will strengthen the system of driver licensing and training to improve the competence and capability of drivers.

Enhancing Safety for Road Users

The design and construction of all roads will consider needs of non-motorized transport, pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. The Government will ensure implementing 'best practices' in this regard by laying down standards for town planners, architects, and highway and traffic authorities.

Promoting Education and Training for Road Safety

Road safety knowledge and awareness will be imparted to people through education, training and awareness campaigns. Road safety education will also be provided to school children and college going students. Different road safety publicity campaigns will be organized to propagate good road safety practices among the community. The Government will make it compulsory for all the authorities associated with road design and construction, traffic management and law enforcement to abide by the road safety policies and norms.

Enforcing of Safety Laws Strictly

The Government will take appropriate measures to support all state and other governments to improve the quality of enforcement in order to ensure effective and uniform implementation of safety laws. The Government will actively strengthen highway Patrolling on National and State Highways in cooperation and coordination with State Governments and Union Territories.

Improving Emergency Medical Services for Road Accidents

The Government will strive to ensure speedy and effective trauma care and management including the provision of rescue operation, first aid at the site of accident and the transportation of the victims from accident site to nearby hospital. The hospitals on the National and State Highways would be sufficiently equipped to provide for trauma care and rehabilitation.

Supporting Research for Road Safety

The Government will encourage research on road safety by funding research

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in identified priority areas adequately and also by establishing centres for research in academic institutions. The Government will facilitate spreading of the results of research and identified good practices through publication, training, conferences, workshops and websites.

Strengthening Legal, Institutional and Financial Environment for Road Safety

The Government will introduce required measures to further strengthen the much needed legal, institutional and financial environment for road safety. The reforms in these areas would provide for the active and increased participation of the community, private sector, academia and NGOs.

Improving Implementation Strategy

The Government will establish a dedicated agency like National Road Safety Board to handle the issues related to road safety and will devise effective strategies for implementation of the Road Safety Policy. The Government has also decided to establish a National Road Safety Fund (NRSF) to finance road activities. A certain percentage of the cess on gasoline and diesel will be allocated to fund NRSF.

Institutional Setup and Initiatives by Ministry of Road Transport & Highways Institutional Set up

GOI constituted the National Road Safety Council - the apex body to take policy decisions in matters of road safety. The Ministry has requested all States and UTs to set up State Road Safety Councils and District Road Safety Committees and hold their meetings regularly.

Road Safety Initiatives by Ministry

On basis of National Road Safety Policy following initiatives taken:

- High priority accorded to identification and rectification of Black Spots.
- Road safety audit of selected National Highways taken up.
- Threshold of 4-laning of National Highways reduced from 15000 to 10000 Passenger Car Units (PCUs).

- The design and construction of road facilities has been made to take in account the needs of non-motorized transport and vulnerable users.
- Government has started focusing on training of drivers and better licensing systems.
- 13 Model Driver Training Institutes have been set up and made operational.
- Ministry has decided to set up 25 Regional Driving Centres.
- Efforts are being made to change driver behaviour.
- Focus has been set on problems of drunken driving, absence of seat belt use, over-speeding and use of mobiles while driving.
- Ministry has now started recognizing the importance and need of safer vehicles.
- MoRTH has sanctioned 10 model Automated Inspection and Certification Centres for Vehicle Fitness in 10 States.
- Addressing Road Safety Challenges in India, the Government of India (GoI) aims to tackle the road safety challenge through a multifaceted approach. The recent enactment of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019 (MVAA) is a laudable and timely step toward reducing the death toll on the roads in India. The WBG provided technical guidance for the draft bill, to help shift its primary focus from motor vehicle registration, motor vehicle use, and penalties, to a more comprehensive legislative framework that covers all aspects of road safety, on par with international good practice.
- **National Highway Accident Relief Service Scheme:**
 - 1) Under the scheme, cranes and ambulances to various State Governments will be provided.
 - 2) NHAI also provides ambulances at a distance of 50 kms. On each completed National Highway under O&M contract. 3 pilot

projects for providing cashless treatment of road accident victims launched.

- 3) GOI has issued guidelines on Good Samaritans to protect them from harassment while trying to save lives of road accident victims.

Road Safety Implementation Challenges in India

Despite substantial challenges in implementation of road safety rules, it can be clearly seen that some progress has been made in most areas. The challenges can be summarized as follows:

1. **Coordination of Implementation through the Various Agencies:** The coordination among 28 states, 8 Union Territories, all the metro regions and local authorities, as well as the agencies has been a challenge for Road Safety Rules to implement. It is necessary to work to a national calendar of priority activities in respect to both enforcement and communication issues, and this is a challenge when many agencies are involved. Fragmentation in implementing enforcement and communication activities has a negative impact on safety.
2. **Lack of Inter-departmental Synchronization and Coordination:** The synchronization and coordination among various departments responsible for road safety rules implementation has been a big challenge. Discussions and joint projects with departments of Justice, Education, Labour, Social Development, Housing, Communications, Safety and Security and Public Enterprises are vital, to ensure a cooperative approach to dealing with the challenges in fine collection, and other areas of joint responsibility.
3. **Behaviour of Road Users:** The behaviour of road users has been the largest contributing factor to the lack of road safety progress. 95% of crashes follow a violation of some kind, most of which involve inappropriate speed, alcohol, unsafe overtaking, unsafe pedestrian behaviour and failure to wear seat belts or helmets. It is extremely difficult to change the behaviour of people in a society.

4. **The Lack of Skilled, Committed Personnel and Funding** has been a huge challenge. In case of many city administrations, there is limited funding for overtime, and as most crashes occur at night and over weekends when officers are not working, this presents a problem. Visibility must be improved, and more officers need to be employed, and properly trained. The public must understand that enforcement is for their benefit.
5. **Delays in Implementation at National Level Due to Lack of Resources** like computerized learner license testing have encouraged city administrations and municipalities to initiate projects without finalization of national standards.
6. **Lack of Management:** Although we have a legitimate government in terms of international democratic processes, there is still a substantial lack of management, HR and other skills. Legitimacy does not equate to competency. Almost 50% of empty posts in some departments pose the question: why is it so difficult to retain skilled and passionate staff? Executive management needs to learn to get the best out of staff, make them feel valued and create an environment which is conducive to action and implementation, instead of continued debate, discussion and prevarication.
7. **Unavailability of Complete, Accurate and Reliable Accident Data:** The absence of complete, accurate and reliable Accident Data is one of the biggest hurdles in the way to correct diagnosis and right policy formulations to address most of the Road Safety Issues.
8. **Shortage of Road Safety Engineers in India:** Making Traffic/Road Safety Engineering a recognized discipline in engineering colleges has not been realized yet, hence there is an acute shortage of Traffic Engineers to be appointed for designing and implementing road safety norms and policies.
9. **Insufficient Indigenous Road Safety Research**
10. **Large 2-Wheeler Population in Vehicle Fleet with Very Poor Operational Safety**

11. **Enforcement of Road Safety Norms 24x7 using Technology for Seamless Road Safety** has not been deployed yet due to lack of required funds, infrastructure and seriousness of enforcement staff.
12. **Inadequate Emergency Care Response:** There have been some improvements at this front but yet it has to be lot better to meet global standards.
13. **Sustainable Funding of Road Safety:** Adequate funds to back Road Safety Policies Enforcement are still not available.
14. **Uninformed and Unorganized Road Maintenance:** During road maintenance activities, traffic is just being diverted to the opposite lanes without proper arrangements to inform vehicles moving in those lanes and this is increasingly contributing to road crashes as high-speed vehicles being in their own lanes expect no opposite traffic and get uncontrolled in such situations.
15. **Road user Compliance with Helmet and Seat Belt Laws in India is reportedly very low.**
16. **Population:** Huge Population in India is the greatest and most difficult to a factor to implement policies for overall growth of the nation and population is proving the biggest challenge to implement Road Safety Policies also.
17. **Mixed Roads Users:** Formulating and Implementing of Road Safety Policies for diverse road users like Pedestrians, Bicycles, Auto-rickshaw, Cycle-rickshaws, Two-Wheelers (Scooters, Motorcycles, etc.), E-Rickshaws, Cars, Buses, Trucks of many types, Self-Designed Vehicles (Jugads), Animals-Driven-Carts has been a challenge for Traffic Authorities in India.

Suggestions

1. Privatization of enforcement by use of available modern techniques will bring down unit cost of strict/effective enforcement.
2. Government must encourage MSMEs, Start-ups, IITs and other institutions in India to work on developing cost-effective ways,

Intelligent Systems and other technologies for cheaper and efficient 24X7 enforcement of Road Safety measures.

3. Stricter licensing Regime needs to be devised and implemented. Data reveals that owners of regular license involved in more number of road accidents (79.1%). This needs scientific evaluation of issue of licenses. Automation in testing for issue of driving license has helped in grant of license to only deserving candidates. The stringent mechanism of driving licensing will help in building awareness among drivers on safe driving.
4. Increase in skilled drivers on road will ensure reduction in road accident cases.
5. Appropriate fencing (high and strong with less numbers of openings) along high-speed highways and expressways will improve safety considerably.
6. Proper Lighting and Reflecting Signboards on roads at Night will improve Road Safety.
7. Current levels of investment in transportation have failed to provide safe public transport and safe infrastructure facilities for road users. This is particularly the case with high-speed roads which lack adequate provision of safe access and crossing facilities for vulnerable road users. Over/under bridges for pedestrians and two-wheelers need to be built at regular distances as vulnerable road users, primarily pedestrians, cyclists, and two-wheelers, account for almost 54 percent of all fatalities and serious injuries (GoI 2019).
8. The Road Maintenance Activities should be planned and carried-out very seriously and professionally making proper arrangements for safe movement of the traffic of the lane under maintenance without disturbing the traffic in the opposite lanes to avoid road crashes.
9. Safety features like ABS, Airbags, Seatbelts, etc. must be made mandatory in even cheapest variants of all types of vehicles.

10. The seatbelts in state roadways buses, school buses and other public/public transports must be provided and strictly enforced by the conductor/attendant present in the vehicle.
11. Road safety management at the national and sub-national levels lack a comprehensive approach. A stronger emphasis needs to be placed on institutional ownership of the problem, accountability for safety performance, safer infrastructure, a regulatory framework that demands greater vehicle safety for all road users, targeted enforcement of safe road user behaviors, and improved post-crash health services.
12. Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Act 2019 (MVAA) recognizes road safety programs must be effectively managed and coordinated through an apex body. It includes a provision to establish an empowered and accountable National Road Safety Board (NRSB) and counterpart state agencies. Several states in India, including Kerala and Gujarat, have, with WBG support, already established independent and empowered state road safety authorities as counterparts to the proposed NRSB. Similar models in other states would help resolve difficult coordination issues between police, transport, health, and other stakeholder agencies, as well as streamline crash reporting processes and procedures at the state and national levels.

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