

Road safety must remain a priority for public authorities

*Dominique Mignot, Université Gustave Eiffel / FERSI vice-president
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The international agenda is now largely dominated by the global warming and energy crises, the war in Ukraine, the risk of terrorism, pandemics, etc. In this context, the issue of road safety is absent or inaudible.

However, many lives continue to be lost or broken (severe injuries) as a result of road crashes in every country in the world, including Europe, even though significant progress has been made, particularly since the 1990s. However, it can also be noted that in several European countries the decline in road deaths is stagnating in recent years (excluding covid periods). It would be unreasonable to wait for a very serious crash to put the issue of road safety back on the political agenda in our countries. We must therefore continue to act with perseverance, whether in terms of prevention, control or support.

As far as prevention is concerned, we have a great deal of work to show that efforts must be made on an ongoing basis and that any reduction in collective vigilance results in an increase in risky behaviour. The increase in average speeds during the Covid crisis, for example, showed that if we do not continue to have clear policies on road safety, the results will only get worse.

In terms of enforcement, and in order to respond to the issues mentioned above, notably internal security, police forces are increasingly mobilised on missions not related to road safety. Here too, the importance of permanent control must be emphasised.

In response to the challenges of climate change, many voices are being raised and actions are being taken to reduce the use of combustion engines and develop soft modes of transport. However, these developments raise new questions in terms of road safety and require new responses.

The development of new forms of mobility, electric bikes and scooters and other individual mobility solutions, is leading to new practices and new crashes, which we are only just beginning to understand in our figures and analyses.

Of course, the technological developments on board have positive effects on road safety. But what would be the role of automated driving? A recent simulation for France¹ estimates a 56-62.8% reduction in the number of fatal crashes, consistent with the 45-63% reduction proposed for advanced technologies in Germany².

Accompanying policies are therefore needed to provide ongoing support for transport, infrastructure and road safety policies, particularly in the European countries. Generally speaking, reliable data and detailed analyses of crash patterns and road user behaviour, and of the role of public policies, are still needed, even in an increasingly complex world.

¹ Pilet, C., Vernet, C. & Martin, J.L. (2021) Estimated crash avoidance with the hypothetical introduction of automated vehicles: a simulation based on experts' assessment from French in-depth data. *Eur. Transp. Res. Rev.* 13, 65 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12544-021-00521-2>

² Lubbe, N., Jeppsson, H., Ranjbar, A., Fredriksson, J., Bärgrman, J., & Östling, M. (2018). [Predicted road traffic fatalities in Germany: The potential and limitations of vehicle safety technologies from passive safety to highly automated driving](#). Ircobi Conference 2018.

Road safety must clearly remain at the heart of public policies for sustainable mobility, and this must be regularly recalled. And it is the role of FERSI and its members to continue to provide quality information, whether on data, methodologies or the best measures to implement, and to contribute more generally to knowledge in order to give our governments the means to continue to act for road safety.

This column is written in a personal capacity and reflects only the author's view.