

# Why it pays for cities to fight road deaths—and how they can get better at it

Written by: Alexandre Santacreu, International Transport Forum and Safer City Streets

Last update: 18 January 2018



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**Every minute of every day, someone loses their life in a traffic crash on a city street. With cities growing rapidly and urban motor traffic also increasing dramatically in many cities, the situation is likely to get worse, not better, in years to come.**

More and more city authorities are realising that dangerous traffic conditions on their streets take a toll that goes beyond the human tragedy and economic loss caused by road deaths and crash injuries. Dangerous traffic makes people feel unsafe and people who feel unsafe will refrain from doing normal things like letting their children walk to school or cycling to work, for instance. A high level of urban road safety is increasingly seen as a critical component of a liveable city. It improves citizens' quality of life, it increases choices, it opens up opportunities. Ultimately, safer city streets are about enhanced personal freedom.

This was recognised in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals in 2016. Governments agreed (in goal number 11) to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". This includes "improving road safety,... with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations".

The link between the different objectives is easy to spot: improving road safety makes cities not only safer, but also more sustainable because it enables people to

walk or cycle without having to fear for their lives. It also makes them more inclusive because those who cannot afford cars can be mobile without running lethal risks.

But in practical terms, what can mayors and city authorities do to enhance traffic safety in their city? One obvious answer is: do not reinvent the wheel—learn from what others are already doing. Many good practices for urban road safety exist around the world and only wait to be copied. A second, maybe less obvious answer is: get your data in shape. Measure what is happening on your streets and how it changes so you can base policy decisions on evidence, not assumptions.

### **When cities learn from each other**

These two thoughts are the driving ideas behind Safer City Streets, the global traffic safety network for liveable cities. Little more than six months after it launched in October 2016, a total of 38 cities began working together in the Safer City Streets network, ranging from Astana in Kazakhstan to Zurich, New York City, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, London, Berlin, Melbourne, Buenos Aires, Montreal and many others.

The Safer City Streets network, which held its first meeting in Paris on 20 and 21 April 2017, provides the first global platform for cities and road safety experts to exchange experiences and efforts to improve the collection of data about urban road crashes to enable cities to compare themselves with others and base policy decisions on reliable evidence. A methodology for the database has already been developed and many of the cities have started feeding in their numbers.

The flying start has been helped by the fact that Safer City Streets itself is building on previous experience: it is modelled on the highly successful International Traffic Safety Data and Analysis Group (IRTAD), the International Transport Forum’s permanent working group on road safety, which brings together countries and national road safety stakeholders. Fittingly, the annual IRTAD meeting was held back-to-back with the inaugural meeting of Safer City Streets—which also included a joint workshop with POLIS, a network of European cities and regions, on how to bring cities from both networks together in order to find the best solutions for data collection.

Cities that are interested in finding out more about Safer City Streets are invited to contact the author at [alexandre.santacreu@itf-oecd.org](mailto:alexandre.santacreu@itf-oecd.org). They should also know that membership in Safer City Streets is currently free thanks to a very generous grant from the Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile (FIA).

Originally published on OECD Insights blog at <http://oe.cd/1TN>

### **References and links**

Visit Safer City Streets at <https://www.itf-oecd.org/safer-city-streets>

Find out more about the International Traffic Safety Data and Analysis Group at <https://www.itf-oecd.org/IRTAD>

Find out more about POLIS at <https://www.polisnetwork.eu/>