

# Enhancing Road Safety in Malta



An NGO live advisory document on key measures to improve road safety and reduce the human impact of road injuries and fatalities

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founded by medical doctors & medical students  
to strive for the highest standards of road safety  
in Malta & Gozo

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## Targeted summary background

Road safety in Malta has raised its profile over the past few years, mainly following Malta's entry into the European Union. In 2014, a Road Safety Strategy was launched by Government with a projected review after 10 years with clear targets, outcomes and key performance indicators. This also saw the launch of a new advisory council on road safety named the Malta Road Safety Council.

The Strategy unfortunately did not meet its main targets of a 50% reduction in fatalities and 30% reduction of grievous injuries. The fatality record varies significantly from year to year and hence it is difficult to compare convincingly with other EU countries' record, with one year exceeding and another below the EU average. Grievous injury records have not been dented by any road safety measure over the past ten years. A closer look at the data reveals that the main brunt of road fatalities are borne by pedestrians and motorcyclists.

Malta has a dense road network and increasing number of vehicles. The economy is driven in a large part by mobility and these factors are closely interrelated. Significant standardised upgrades to the main arterial connections have not been replicated in the minor road network and the standards in towns and villages is inconsistent.

Enforcement has not been traditionally strong, reflecting a culture which has yet to embrace a 'safety first' approach even by officials who are there to enforce that. Laws have been revised for the better but visibility of the results are lacking. It took a recent spate of drug and drink driving fatalities in order to get updated legislation on this issue to the fore; we are still waiting for these to be finalised, implemented and enforced. There is a feeling of inertia when it comes to deliver credible enforcement and this seems to be related to the fine relationship between good governance and popular political allegiance.

Education on road safety is erratic and has yet to reach consistency. Efforts are made by the authorities as well as NGOs like ours, but this is only a drop in the ocean of need. Spikes of educational messages are usually recorded around Christmas time or when a spate of road fatalities hit the headlines.

Traffic management is handled by the same authority which is responsible for road safety. It does not help that the popular pulse, when measured, points to the former as being the problem rather than the latter. Road safety is thus eclipsed by traffic management in the priority list.

Malta faces considerable road safety challenges. Other countries have embraced Vision Zero as a start to address the road safety problem. Maltese authorities have declared this on occasion, but we have yet to witness a large scale highly visible strategic approach to this vision and then accompanied by a solid and consistent Safe Systems approach.

Doctors for Road Safety since its inception has statutorily adopted the Vision Zero approach. In this document, our NGO suggests and advises on key interventions which in its opinion will help alleviate the negative human impact when road safety management does not meet its goals.

# 1. Data Collection and Monitoring

Successful management flows from good data.

## 1.1 Improve Crash Data Systems

- Develop a comprehensive database for recording and analysing road crash data.
- Encourage real-time reporting and investigation of accidents to identify causative factors.

The establishment of the long overdue Transport Safety Investigative Commission is essential to start delivering on these systems.

## 1.2 Set Targets and Monitor Progress

- Establish clear, measurable targets for accident reduction and road safety improvements.
- Conduct annual reviews and publish progress reports to maintain transparency and accountability.

The Road Safety Strategy needs to be updated. Its KPIs need to be observed and made public. This will enhance credibility on those responsible for road safety management. An Annual Report on road safety should be a minimum requirement by the transport authority.

# 2. Infrastructure Improvements

## 2.1 Upgrade Road Design and Maintenance

- Conduct regular audits of existing road infrastructure to identify hazardous locations. This needs to include minor roads and road crash black spots.
- Install traffic calming measures such as speed bumps, roundabouts, and clear signage in high-risk areas.
- Ensure timely maintenance of road surfaces, lighting, and markings to prevent crashes caused by poor conditions.
- Address road soiling by irresponsible truck drivers who spatter roads and markings by their loads be it concrete mixers or other road soiling substances. Severe penalties need to be in place for such transgressions.
- The spoiling of road surfaces by the very enforcement officers by spraying car outlines after collisions so that cars may be moved expeditiously, should stop. This signage usually remains for several weeks to months, providing a distraction to drivers with its consequent risks.
- Ensure better signage on maximum speeds allowed on all roads. Road surface speed signage needs to become a standard in all road design.

Road design is crucial in managing safe systems. Driver errors are to be expected in the Vision Zero, safe systems approach to road safety management. The infrastructure should be designed in a way that will minimise the negative impact of those errors.

## 2.2 Enhance Pedestrian and Cyclist Facilities

- Expand and maintain pavements particularly in urban centres.
- Pedestrian crossings should meet standards for adequate lighting, visibility and braking surface.

A Pedestrian First approach should be adopted both in infrastructure as well as in education. Unfortunately, even pavements in Malta are designed (by default or by lassitude) to cater for cars rather than pedestrians as witnessed by the large amount of ramps transecting urban pavements to allow cars out of garages. To avoid falls, pedestrians, especially elderly, often take to the road to walk, with potentially devastating consequences.

## 3. Enforcement and Legislation

### 3.1 Strengthen Traffic Law Enforcement

- Increase police and TM enforcement presence and surveillance at accident hotspots and during peak hours.
- Explore the use of average speed cameras in dedicated routes where speed is abused.
- Introduce enforcement by use of technology. This should be widened beyond the use of speed cameras and allow better use of dashcam enforcement technology.
- Technology to detect illegal use of smartphones during driving exists and should be adopted.
- Distraction should not be promoted by the use of aggressive roadside billboard use. This practice should be regulated better. Standards on billboard formats should be legislated. Failure to regulate this well would amount to institutionally sanctioned distraction.
- Reckless driving should not be tolerated. This should be defined reflected strongly in our laws. Unfortunately, a recent proposal to revise the drink and drug driving law is being promoted which will inevitably downplay the devastating consequences of reckless driving . This is the wrong message.
- Drink and Drug roadside testing should become the rule not the exception. This should be evident all year round and not just at Christmas time or following a spate of drink and drug driving fatal crashes, as has been in evidence in mid-2025.
- A zero-tolerance approach should be adopted on the main causes of crashes such as smartphone distraction, speed abuse, dangerous overtaking and other reckless behaviour, as well as driving under the influence of drink or drugs. Penalties on these behaviours should include withdrawal of the driving licence.

The message should be that those who threaten road safety should not be allowed to drive. The driving licence is a privilege and not a right. That privilege should be withdrawn if people do not observe the law.

### 3.2 Update Road Safety Legislation

- Review and modernise traffic laws to address issues such as drink and drug driving (in progress) and road soiling as mentioned above.
- Explore laws which will allow the better use of technology to enhance road safety as described above.

## 4. Education and Awareness

### 4.1 Campaigns and school curricula

- Road safety campaigns targeting speed, distraction, and drink-driving should be consistent and not erratic and sporadic.
- Engage local media, social platforms, influencers to disseminate safety messages.
- Road safety in schools should be part of the curriculum from a young age onwards.
- Targeted campaigns toward pedestrians to ensure in turn their cooperation with road safety laws.
- Promote responsible driving attitudes and respect for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists.

Respect and Courtesy are two essential cultural shifts which inexpensively enhance road safety. Investment in campaigns which address this is highly recommended. Consider strongly the introduction of behavioural psychologists on teams which manage road safety.

### 4.2 Driver Training, Assessment, and Monitoring

- Revise driver education programmes to include hazard perception, defensive driving, and first aid basics.
- Review Driver Trainers with the aim of introducing standards of teaching which go beyond success in passing driving tests in their students. A regression in driving skills is often noted after passing the test indicating that training is being focused merely on passing the driving test rather than at maintaining a safe driving practice.
- Introduce regular refresher courses and periodic reassessment for all drivers, especially commercial vehicle operators.
- New drivers should be on probation for a period of not less than two years after being granted the privilege of a driving licence. Misdemeanours need to be penalised with rehabilitation or withdrawal of licence depending on their severity.
- Speed limiters on new drivers should be the rule not the exception. Besides offering a better deal on insurance premia, these would introduce and reinforce the concept of speed limit observance to novice drivers.
- Speed limiters may be used as part of a strategy of addressing speed related offences, including repeat speed camera offenders.
- Every infraction of road safety should be followed up by the Authority to make sure an adequate response by the driver is achieved.

## 5. Institutional interventions

### 5.1 Emergency response

- Enhance the capacity and response times of emergency services for road crashes.
- Funding on emergency response should be maintained and enhanced as this is a crucial part of the safe systems approach to road safety
- Provide training for first responders in trauma care and accident scene management. This should include training of drivers in roadside first aid as part of the driving test.

## 5.2 Targeted interventions

- A close look at any available data to support interventions on pedestrians and motorcyclists, which are the main road fatalities in Malta.
- Stronger enforcement on drivers who disrespect pedestrians and motorcyclists. This also counts as much for pedestrians and motorcyclists who abuse road safety laws.
- Minor violations may be addressed with an information strategy e.g. explanatory letter at home. Repeat violations should trigger an inconvenience event e.g. necessitate brief road safety revision course.
- A citizen reporting system (eg with the use of Dashcam footage) should be allowed by law (see above) without inconveniencing the same citizen. Follow-up should be provided to the citizen.
- Ensure close liaison between the Authority and local councils to make road safety a priority also at a local level and standardise the infrastructure across localities within our one country jurisdiction.
- Motorists should be encouraged to purchase cars with advanced road safety features by financial incentivisation. Safer cars is another important part of the safe systems approach to road safety.

## 5.3 Vision Zero

- The transport authority which is responsible for road safety (Transport Malta) needs to adopt and advertise the concept of Vision Zero.
- The current Road Safety Council should have wider powers and be free and independent from the transport authority which regulates it.
- Ultimately, road safety should be managed by a Road Safety Authority which is the central body responsible for coordinating, regulating, analysing, and driving all road safety policy and interventions across government and society. This dedicated unit of experts will be focused solely on items and issues which affect road safety directly or indirectly, as present in other EU countries.

## Conclusion

This document provides a multi-faceted approach to road safety in Malta, focusing on data management, infrastructure, enforcement, education, and other targeted interventions. Although comprehensive, more detail is inevitable on discussion and further interventions may be needed, making documents such as this a living one, with updates being done as necessary. Commitment is now imminently due for Malta to move towards a future where road safety is guaranteed to road users.