

## **Traffic safety in emerging countries: making roads self-explaining through intelligent support systems.**

J. Godthelp,  
Road Safety for All, The Netherlands  
hg@roadsafetyforall.org

### **ABSTRACT**

In most emerging countries road accidents cause a huge problem of public health. The Safe system approach is generally considered as the leading concept on the way to road safety. Based on the fundamental premise that humans make mistakes, the overall traffic system should be 'forgiving'. Road design is generally considered as one of the key elements of the Safe system approach. Roads should be self-explaining, i.e. naturally impose correct speeds and clearly indicate what type of traffic participants are to be expected and how interactions between the different types of participants should take place. Speed management is advised to be a significant factor in modern road design.

However, the design principles behind the Safe system approach are certainly not leading in today's infrastructure developments in emerging countries. Cities are getting larger and networks of roads are expanding. In many cases, existing through-roads in local communities are up-graded, resulting in heavy traffic loads and high speeds on places, that are absolutely not suited for this kind of through-traffic.

Although intelligent driver support systems are on their way of development for quite a long period, their potential role in the safe system concept is unclear and strongly underexposed. Nevertheless new technology might serve as an enabling factor in developing safe road systems in emerging countries. Relatively simple and cheap technologies may inform and guide drivers. Navigation systems may get a broad functionality. Speed can easily be influenced through advisory, enforcing and limiting speed support systems, that make use of this technology. Intersections may be controlled with the assistance of robust traffic sensors. In other words: roads may become self-explaining - not only by their physical design characteristics - but also by guiding drivers and vulnerable road users through cooperative communication systems, related to speed and intersection control. And also: smart roads will provide information on public transport facilities and traffic jams, helping people to choose their optimal way of travelling.

This paper introduces the notion of self-explaining cars as a significant component of the Safe system approach. It gives an overview of the traditional self-explaining road concept and a vision on the way new support systems may be implemented in this concept in order to accelerate safety developments in emerging countries.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The number of traffic fatalities in The Netherlands reached a peak value of 3264 in 1972. After that year a long and steady period of safety programs followed. Passive safety measures intended to reduce the consequences of accidents and obligatory seat belt use may be considered as one of the most successful in this category.

Strategies for law enforcement followed, not only to increase seat belt use but also to improve speed behavior and reduce alcohol abuse. All of these measures gave a first boost towards a reduction of the number of fatalities. A more or less definite breakthrough was reached by developing the so-called concept of Sustainable safety. Fig. 1 gives the development of the road safety figures over the years with a lowest number of 570 in 2014. Developments similar to The Netherlands took place in most of the other Western European countries and internationally the underlying approach has been announced as the Safe System approach.

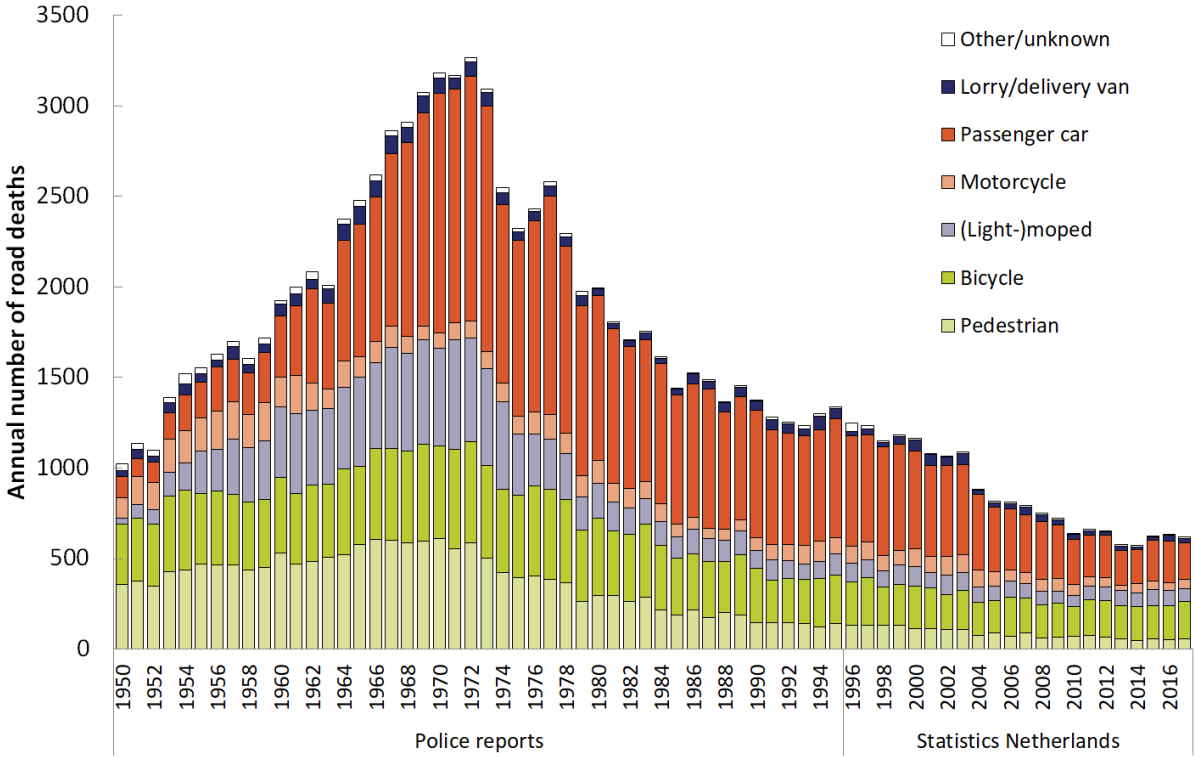


Fig. 1 Annual number of road traffic deaths The Netherlands. [1]

Nowadays the number of traffic fatalities in countries with emerging economies develops more or less similarly to that in Western Europe in the 1970s. Fig. 2 gives an illustration for India with a number of fatalities of 150000 in 2015. Like 50 years ago in The Netherlands safety belt use is promoted and enforcement strategies on speed and alcohol use develop. Gururaj and Gautham [2] give an extensive overview of the situation in India and about policies needed to reach improvements. And indeed, casualty numbers after 2015 show a slight decline, although reliability still may be limited. Similar developments take place in many low and medium income countries, particularly in case of emerging economies.

In March 2010 the UN General Assembly proclaimed the Decade of Action for Road Safety. The Action intends to reach significant improvements in road safety and works with a program based on 5 pillars: road safety management; safer roads and mobility; safer vehicles; safer road users; and post-crash response.

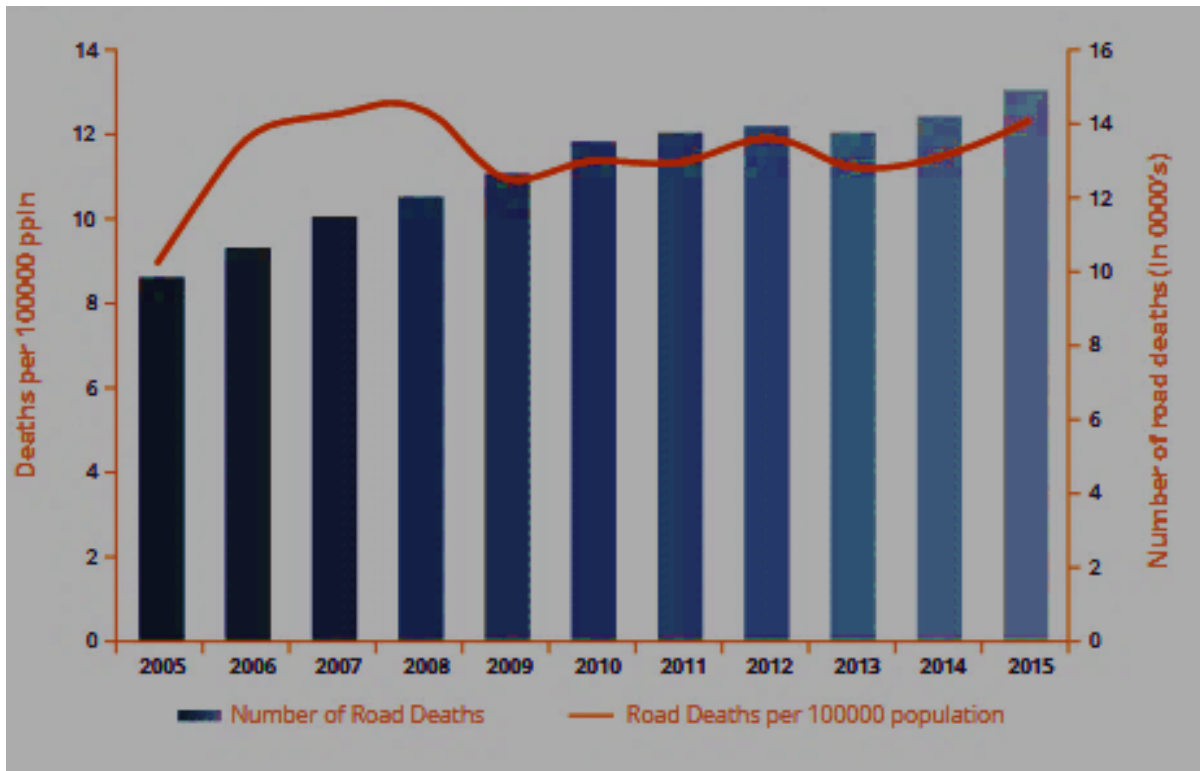


Fig. 2. Annual number of road traffic deaths in India. [2]

In addition, the Brasilia Declaration on Road safety was signed in 2015. Countries agreed to halve road traffic deaths by the end of this decade – a key milestone within the new Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 3.6. The 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that road safety is a prerequisite to ensuring healthy lives, promoting well-being and making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Now that the Decade of Action approaches 2020, some first positive results become visible. However the general trend is still quite disappointing. Fig. 3 shows the trend as illustrated in the WHO Global Status Report on road safety in 2018 with a dramatic number of 1.35 million fatalities worldwide in 2016.

These numbers make clear that extra efforts are needed. Although the Safe system approach is advocated as the holy grail for definite improvements a systematic approach is lacking in many countries. Focusing on safer vehicles and roads will not necessarily lead to a safe traffic system. Also the question rises whether and how new visions on the use of connected traffic systems, vehicles and users, anno 2020, may be made more effective in the battle for road safety. These developments may have the potential to stimulate countries in using a leapfrog strategy in order to reduce their fatality numbers. This paper gives some thoughts into this direction. In future self-explaining cars, trucks and buses might use self-explaining roads, adapted

to personal devices like cell-phones provided with supportive safety apps. This would make the traffic system self-explaining as a whole. A safe system.

**Figure 1: Number and rate of road traffic death per 100,000 population: 2000–2016**

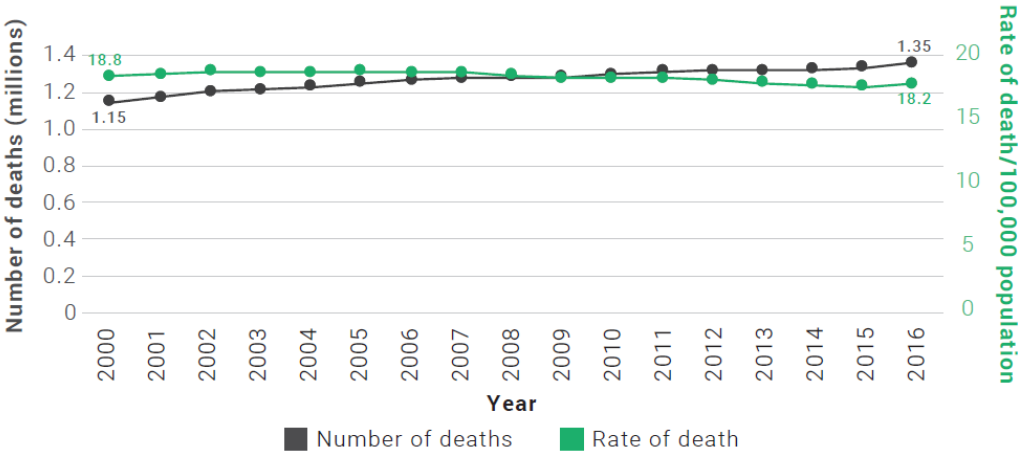


Fig. 3 Number and rate of road traffic death per 100000 population worldwide 2000-2016. [3]

**2. SAFE SYSTEM APPROACH**

In many western countries the Safe system approach resulted in an immense improvement in traffic safety. Welle et al (2018) give a nice overview of the concept, its results and potential role in low and middle income countries [4]. The Dutch Sustainable Safety approach served as one of the building stones of the Safe System approach [5]. Both concepts are strongly related. Table 1 gives a description of the principles behind the Sustainable Safety concept.

Table 1. Description of the five Sustainable Safety principles. [5].

Sustainable Safety Principle	Description
<i>Functionality</i> of roads	Monofunctionality of roads as either through roads, distributor roads, or access roads in a hierarchically structured road network
<i>Homogeneity</i> of mass and/or speed and direction	Equality of speed, direction, and mass at moderate and high speeds
<i>Predictability</i> of road course and road user behaviour by a recognizable road design	Road environment and road user behaviour that support road user expectations through consistency and continuity of road design
<i>Forgivingness</i> of the environment and of road users	Injury limitation through a forgiving road environment and anticipation of road user behaviour
<i>State awareness</i> by the road user	Ability to assess one's capacity to handle the driving task

One of the fundamental premises behind the safe system approach is the notion that the road traffic system should take account of human limitations. The system is open to a variety of users of which children and elderly are a significant part. In addition, lots of factors may be the reason for human failures. Fatigue, bad visibility, drivers being distracted and buses speeding because of tight time schedules. Unlike professional systems such as aviation, all of these aspects are to be included in an approach for a safe road traffic system. Human limitations therefore are to be considered as one of the basic characteristics behind the system. Analysis of human skills serves as an important tool for analysis of these limitations. To get a feeling about the traffic task it has been proven useful to make a distinction between a number of task levels:

1. Modality level, e.g. deciding to travel by bus, car, bike, or as a pedestrian.
2. Network level: decisions about route choice and navigation;
3. Tactical level: decisions on lane changing, speeding, crossing, etc.
4. Operational level: vehicle control.

A systems view on traffic behavior will take notice of the interactions between these different task levels. Development of a robust public transport system will serve as an important instrument to improve road safety. In future cities the clever mix of public and private transport will be leading in mobility development. Dividing the road network in a set of clearly defined road categories will guide route choice behavior. Such a network should also be based on a view on the functionality of roads. Roads may thus be categorized as either through roads, distributor roads, or access-roads in a hierarchically structured road network. Traffic signs and signals as well as road design characteristics will thus give guidance to road users in order to make optimal decisions.

The philosophy of Self Explaining Roads [6, 7] served as one of the significant components of the Sustainable Safety recipe. The idea implies that the road network is designed in such a way that roads more or less naturally give control to human expectations and thus traffic behavior. Self-explaining roads naturally impose correct speeds and clearly indicate what type of traffic participants are to be expected and how interactions between the different types of participants should take place. Speed management is considered as a significant factor in modern road design. On self-explaining roads this guidance process is more or less informal, but not without limiting conditions. Roundabouts do clearly limit speed and thus give guidance to the process of interaction with other road users on the particular intersection. Similarly speed humps and lifted intersections do limit speed in areas with a mix of cars and vulnerable road users. The concept of Self explaining roads has been advocated and applied on a broad scale, [8,9].

Ref. [4] emphasizes aspects like shared responsibility and the importance of planning, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring as key elements behind the safe systems approach and it is evident that all of these are of utmost importance, not only in western countries, but also in the low and middle income countries.

Nevertheless, for the arguments of the present paper it is important to note that the design principles behind the safe system approach are certainly not leading in today's infrastructure developments in low and middle income countries. Cities are getting larger and networks of roads are expanding in a chaotic manner. In many

cases, existing through-roads in local communities are up-graded, resulting in heavy traffic loads, high speeds and mixed traffic on places, that are absolutely not suited for this kind of through-traffic.

The question therefore arises whether our expectations about the potential role of the Safe system approach in its present shape on a worldwide scale are realistic. In many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, roads and transport facilities may not be suited for a relatively quick transfer towards an orderly system and network. This may prevent a relatively quick 'leapfrog' towards the wished for situation with a reduction in the number of road traffic fatalities as intended. .

In order to reach that goal the safe system approach probably needs a new dimension. The challenge seems to make a connection with new technologies, not only transport technologies, but also those in the area of communication (smartphones) and sustainable development (electric vehicles).

### **3. INTELLIGENT TRANSPORT SYSTEMS.**

Intelligent transport systems are on their way for about 30 years. The expectation has been and still is that in the course of time, subsequent levels of automation will appear ranging from no automation to driver assistance, to partial automation, to conditional automation and finally to full automation. [10, 11], see Table 2

Table 2. Levels of automation in road traffic [10, 11]

No automation (level 0)	The full-time performance by the human driver of all aspects of the dynamic driving task, even when enhanced by warning or intervention systems
Driver assistance (level 1)	The driving mode-specific execution by a driver assistance system of either steering or acceleration/deceleration using information about driving conditions, with the expectation that the human driver performs all remaining dynamic aspects of the driving task
Partial automation (level 2)	The driving mode-specific execution by one or more driver assistance systems of both steering and acceleration/deceleration using information about driving conditions, with the expectation that the human driver performs all remaining dynamic aspects of the driving task
Conditional automation (level 3)	The driving mode-specific performance by an automated driving system of all dynamic aspects of the driving task, with the expectation that the human driver will respond appropriately to a request to intervene
High automation (level 4)	The driving mode-specific performance by an automated driving system of all dynamic aspects of the driving task, even if a human driver does not respond appropriately to a request to intervene
Full automation (level 5)	The full-time performance by an automated driving system of all dynamic aspects of the driving task under all roadway and environmental conditions that can be managed by a human driver

Noy et al (2018) present the levels of automation from another point of view, i.e. from a driver centric perspective [12]. Fig. 4 illustrates the dimensions a) partial versus full automation and b) functioning part of the time versus all of the time. The four quadrants give insight in the maturity level of the different technologies. And thus in their potential role to serve as a practical road safety benefit in the coming decades. Technologies related to navigation systems, cruise and speed control, lane keeping and anti- collision systems may be considered as more or less mature. Vehicle to vehicle connections and technologies for smart intersections are also on their way to maturity.

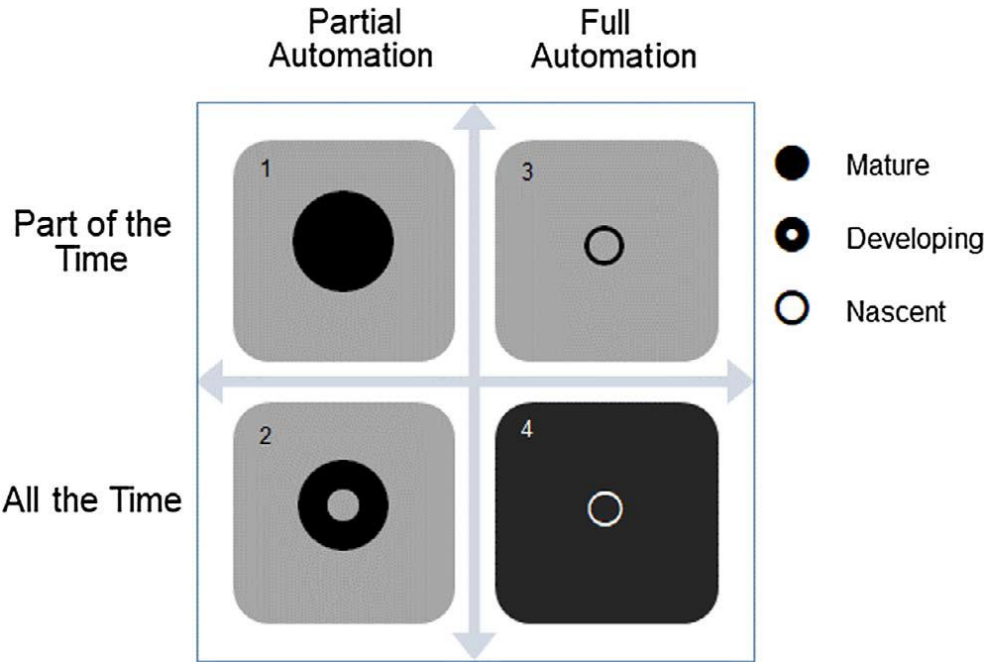


Fig. 4. A scheme for categorizing levels of automated driving from a human-centric perspective [12].

The potential safety effects of Intelligent Transport systems has been analyzed and described extensively and thoroughly. Carsten and Tate (2005) illustrated that fatality numbers may be reduced by more than 50% by implementing intelligent speed adaptation [13]. Wilmink et.al (2008) made an estimate about the safety effects of 25 intelligent vehicle safety systems, see Table 3. [14]. Vaa et al. (2014) compared safety effects of different support systems, also indicating highest effects of speed adaptation systems [15]. Kulmala (2010) developed a comprehensive framework for the safety assessment of intelligent transport systems [16].

Table 3. Effects of 12 Intelligent Vehicle Safety System (IVSS) on the number of road fatalities in 25 EU member states in case of 100% fleet penetration by safety mechanism [14].

System	Effects of IVSS on the number of road fatalities by safety mechanism (%)								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Electronic stability control ESC ( <i>corrected by author</i> )	-21.1		+4.2	+0.4				+0.5	
Full-speed range adapt. cruise control	-2.1		+0.9					-0.2	
Emergency braking			+0.3						
Pre-crash protection for vulnerable road users	-2.5		+0.2						
Lane change assistance	-2.3		+0.2			+0.04			
Lane keeping Support	-17.7		+2.8						
Night vision warning	-6.9		+3.5			+0.7	+0.3	+0.3	
Drowsiness monitoring/warning	-7.9		+2.2			+0.7	+0.6	+0.0	
Emergency call eCall									-5.8
Intersection safety support	-8.6		+5.0						
Wireless local danger warning	-3.1		+0.2		-1.6				
Speed alert	-5.5	-1.0	-1.0		-1.0			-0.5	

The safety mechanisms are:

- (1) Direct in-vehicle modification of the driving task.
- (2) Direct influence by roadside systems.
- (3) Indirect modification of user behaviour.
- (4) Indirect modification of non-user behaviour.
- (5) Modification of interaction between users and non-users.
- (6) Modification of exposure.
- (7) Modification of modal choice.
- (8) Modification of route choice.
- (9) Modification of accident consequences only.

Taken together most of the studies clearly point to the potential benefits of isolated intelligent support systems. Yet a more integrated vision about their role in the Safe system concept is unclear and strongly underexposed. Ref. [20] strongly argues for a safe systems approach in evaluating the safety effects of automation in road traffic.

The GIDS project [17, 18] presented an early system philosophy, in which a number of isolated in-car support systems are transformed into one integrated, communication system. As such GIDS made the connection between intelligent support systems and the safe system approach. GIDS provides driver support on all levels of the driving task, i.e. modality choice, navigation, anti-collision, speed adaptation, and active vehicle guidance. A dialog control system regulates the overall driver workload. GIDS connected car intelligence with local traffic circumstances. Although GIDS was developed in the pre-smartphone era, connections were also made with so-called applications, nowadays known as apps.

Now that we live in the connected world of 2020, life is a lot easier, and the development of a GIDS like intelligent travel support system seems within reach. Cars, trucks and buses become more and more intelligent, i.e. sensing, thinking and explaining. Yes, also self-driving, but for the coming period, let 's say until 2050, the combination of driver support with partial automation seems achievable and by far most effective in terms of safety benefits. This perspective makes it rather disappointing that a vision about the role of connected mobility in the Safe system context is still missing. Let's give it a try.



#### **4. TOWARD A SAFE SYSTEM: SELF EXPLAINING CARS ON SELF EXPLAINING ROADS.**

Although the developments of autonomous vehicles do get a lot of publicity, realistic expectations and predictions indicate that during the coming decades humans drive the car. Vision papers, like those by Price Waterhouse Cooper (2019) make a clear statement [19].

*Various autonomous driving technologies already in use are designed to improve safety, such as rear-view cameras, automatic braking, adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning, etc. These options are increasingly implemented in autonomous vehicles of level 1 (function-specific) and 2 (combined function) and quickly become standard. .*

*The road to level 3 (limited self-driving) and level 4 (full self-driving) of autonomous driving is more difficult due to challenges that exist around high definition mapping, interaction with (and prediction of) human drivers and adaptation to changing infrastructures and circumstances. The complexity of this requires considerable investment and cooperation, the results of which will probably only be visible over time.*

The authors of the WRI, Michelin and OECD vision papers [4, 10, 20], all show some hesitation about the potential safety benefits of connected mobility and intelligent transport systems. For emerging countries leapfrogging toward a Safe system is expected through strengthening institutions, frameworks, laws, regulations and guidelines. And of course this sort of developments are of crucial importance, together with making roads and vehicles safer through human oriented design. The Safe system approach is a strong concept. No doubt.

However this same Safe system approach anno 2020 asks for a new vision about the link with concepts like the Internet of Things. Today cars, trucks and buses are connected with apps and smartphones, which brings us a myriad of options for personal assistance. All automobile manufacturers do deliver apps for Android and iOS systems They make their cars part of the personal network of their clients. They make cars Self explaining. The functionality of these systems is diverse: traffic information, navigation, remote park information, speed assist, emergency support, etc.

The conceptual connection between this sort of personal assistance apps and the original GIDS concept is easily made. An intelligent driver support app will serve as the dialog controller of the new smartphone oriented support system. The app will give support at the level of traffic modality ( what is faster, metro or car) and route (what is the safest and fastest route through the city network?) choice. And will also be connected to the settings of the lane guidance, speed adaptation and anti-collision system. Connecting the car to this personal assistant will ultimately make vision zero a realistic option.

Now that the smartphone is widely spread out worldwide and the basic support functions in vehicles (navigation, speed and cruise control, anti-collision) are practically available, this development might serve as an enabling factor in developing safe road systems in emerging countries. New and older cars have to be connected to personal networks and related communication systems Relatively simple and cheap technologies may inform and guide drivers. Navigation systems that are aware of the road network and traffic conditions do get a broad functionality.

Speed can be influenced through advisory, enforcing and limiting speed support systems, that make use of this technology. Interactions at crossings may be controlled with the assistance of robust traffic sensors, connected to the car. Vulnerable road users can be made visible or audible in-car. In other words: roads may become self-explaining - not only by their physical design characteristics - but also by guiding drivers and vulnerable road users through communication systems, related to speed and intersection control. And also: information about public transport facilities and traffic jams may help people to choose their optimal way of travelling.

Anno 2030 connected mobility will be available in more or less definite form. Not only for western countries, but worldwide. The mixture of smartphones, navigation systems, intelligent speed adaption, ant-collision and lane keeping technology, based on smart sensors and satellite communication can be transformed into a relatively modest traffic guidance system. Integration of these basic components into a personalized, driver support system would bring us in the world of the self-explaining car. Certainly not in the world of the self-driving car, which will not be in practical use in the coming decades.

Self-explaining vehicles in combination with mobile apps will serve as an easy accessible tool which will help travelers to find their way in both public and private transport and related transfer facilities. The self-explaining car will be able to make use of both self-explaining and traditional roads. The in-car driver support system will guide the road user in behaving safely, i.e. give inherently safe guidance to speed and interaction with vulnerable road users. Self-explaining cars on self-explaining roads will make a Safe System.

## **5. FINAL REMARKS**

The decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020 as proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in March 2010 presents an important message for safety interventions. The Safe system approach gives a challenging framework for the actions needed. The problem of traffic fatalities on a worldwide scale is enormous and therefore also included in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. However, until now the aspired goal, i.e. a strong reduction in fatality numbers, has not been reached.

This paper argues that for emerging countries like India, Brazil, Nigeria, etc. a new vision is needed for implementing a Safe system approach in road traffic. The concept of self-explaining roads should be integrated with that of self-explaining vehicles. This vision might give a leapfrog solution for safety improvements in countries with traditional road networks

This concept of self-explaining vehicles can make use of the mature components of intelligent support systems, i.e. navigation systems, speed and cruise control systems, vehicle to vehicle connections and smart intersections. These technologies can relatively easily be transformed into an integrated support system connected to the users smartphone. Development of such systems might be stimulated through large scale demonstration and pilot programs to be organized by international bodies, as represented in ref. [3, 4, 10, 20].

Policy makers might invite automobile manufacturers, infra and traffic industry, tier 1 suppliers, smartphone and mobile app industry to integrate their efforts and focus on well-known issues like self-explaining roads and integrate this concept with that of connected, self-explaining vehicles.

The concept of self-explaining vehicles may at the end not only be highly profitable for road safety in emerging countries. They may also give the ultimate solution for the remaining unsafety in Western Europe. The approach will give us a definite picture of a traffic world without accidents.

-

## REFERENCES

1. SWOV (2018). *Road deaths in the Netherlands*. SWOV Fact sheet, The Hague, The Netherlands.
2. Gururaj G, Gautham M S. *Advancing Road Safety in India-Implementation is the Key (Summary)*, Bengaluru, 2017. National Institute of Mental Health & Neuro Sciences; 2017. 60p. Publication Number :137.
3. WHO,(2018). *Global status report on road safety 2018*. Geneva: World Health Organization . Licence: CC BYNC
4. Welle, N., Sharpin, A.B. Adiazola-Steil, C., Batt, A., Alveano, S., Obelheiro, M., Tolga Imamoglu, C., Job, S., Shotten, M., and Bose, D., (2018) *Sustainable and Safe: a vision and guidance for zero road deaths*. World Resources Institute and Global Road Safety Facility, ISBN:978-1-56973-927-7.
5. SWOV (2006). *Advancing Sustainable Safety*. Wegman, F.C.M., and Aarts, L.T., eds. The Hague, The Netherlands.
6. Godthelp, J. (1990). *Towards control in road traffic*. (in Dutch) *Verkeerskunde*, 41, nr. 3. The Netherlands.
7. Theeuwes, J. and Godthelp. J. (1995) *Self explaining roads*. *Safety Science*, Volume 19, Issues 2–3, June 1995, Pages 217-225.
8. Bekiaris, E., and Gaitanidou, E.,(2011) *Towards Forgiving and Self-Explanatory Roads*. In: E. Bekiaris et al. (eds.), *Infrastructure and Safety in a Collaborative World*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-642-18372-0\_2, Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, Germany.
9. Van Geem, C., Charman, S., Ahern, A., Anund, A., Sjögren, L., Pumberger, A., Grayson, G., and Helman. S (2013) *Speed adaptation control by Self explaining roads (SPACE)*. 16th Road Safety on Four Continents Conference Beijing, China 15-17.
10. Michelin (2014). *Road safety and connected mobility. An overview report on the current status and implications of road safety and connected mobility*. Michelin Challenge Bibendum. [https://community.Michelinchallenge bibendum. Com](https://community.Michelinchallengebibendum.com)
11. SAE, 2016. *Taxonomy and definitions for terms related to driving automation systems for on-road motor vehicles*. SAE International, pp. 30. [http://standards.sae.org/j3016\\_201609](http://standards.sae.org/j3016_201609).
12. Noy, I. Y., Shinar, D. and Horreya. W.J., (2018). *Automated driving: Safety blind spots*. *Safety Science* 102 (2018) 68–78.
13. Wilmlink, I., Janssen, W., Jonkers, E., Malone, K., van Noort, M., Klunder, G., Rämä, P., Sihvola, N., Kulmala, R., Schirokoff, A., Lind, G., Benz, T., Peters, H., Schönebeck, S., (2008). *Impact assessment of intelligent vehicle safety systems*. eIMPACT Deliverable D4. Version 1.0 July 2008.

14. Kulmala, R.(2010) Ex-ante assessment of the safety effects of intelligent transport systems. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 42 (2010) 1359–1369.
15. Carsten, O.M.J. and Tate, F.N. (2005) Intelligent speed adaptation: accident savings and cost–benefit analysis. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 37 (3). pp. 407-416. ISSN 0001-4575.
16. Vaa, T., Assum, T. and Elvik, R. (2014) Driver support systems: Estimating road safety effects at varying levels of implementation. TØI report 1304/2014, Institute of Transport Economics, Oslo, Norway.
17. Godthelp, J. and Op de Beek, F.(1991), Driving with GIDS: Behavioural Interaction with the GIDS Architecture, *Advanced Telematics in Road Transport*, Proceedings of the DRIVE Conference, Brussels, p. 351 – 370.
18. Michon, J. A. (Ed.). (1993). *Generic intelligent driver support*. London: Taylor & Francis; 255 pp.
19. <https://www.pwc.nl/en/industries/automotive/the-future-of-mobility.html>
20. OECD/ITF (2018). Safer roads with automated vehicles? Christ, P. and Voegelé T.(eds.), *Conclusions from the Workshop "Safety and Security on the Road to Automated Transport: The Good, the Uncertain and the Necessary"* held in November 2017 in Paris, France.