

The Safe System Approach

Fact Sheet

Working together to prevent road trauma



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The safe system seeks to create forgiveness in the system so when a crash occurs it doesn't have to result in serious harm.

Background

Traditionally, transport systems are designed for maximum capacity and mobility - not safety! The responsibility for safe driving is placed on the shoulders of the road users, not on the design of the traffic system.

The safe system approach takes the opposite approach by focusing on the design and management of our traffic systems. It acknowledges that people are fallible and can make mistakes that can lead to crashes. A safe system accommodates human error and the vulnerability of the human body.

The safe system approach was first adopted by Sweden in 1997. Today, the number of traffic deaths per 100,000 population in Sweden is half that of Australia. Western Australia adopted the safe system approach in 2009 through its *Towards Zero* strategy to improving road safety.

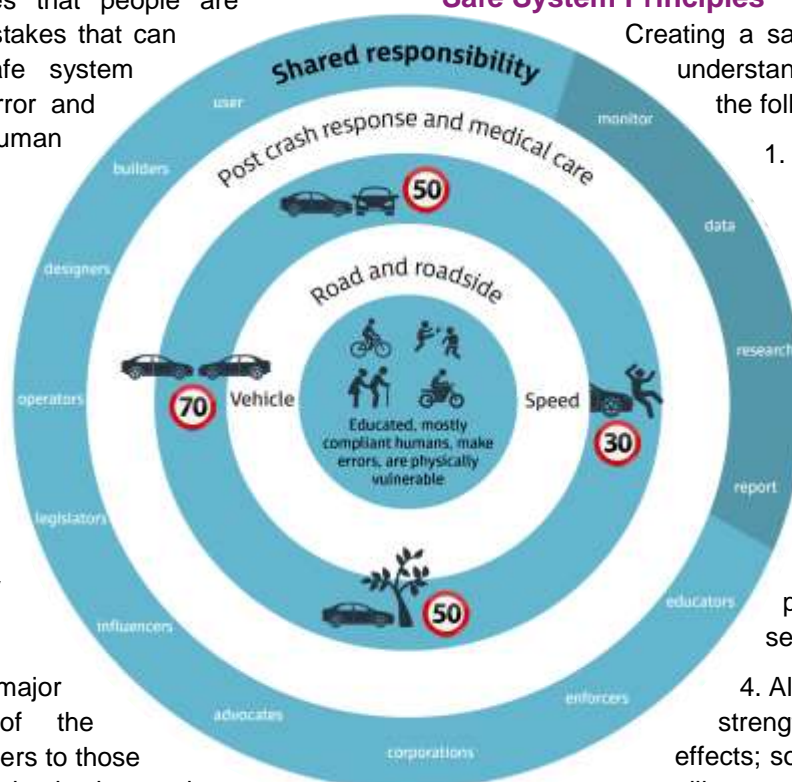
This approach means a major shift in the share of the responsibility from road users to those who design, build and maintain the road transport system. System designers include road engineers, planners and managers, the automotive industry, police, politicians and legislative bodies. The individual road users have the responsibility to abide by road laws and rules.

Within a safe system the interactions between behaviours, vehicles and speeds with road and roadside infrastructure can be managed by installing proven system wide treatments such as wire rope barriers, audible edge lining, round-a-bouts and sealed shoulders. Targeted speed reductions and the promotion of safer vehicles are also necessary to further protect road users.

Safe System Principles

Creating a safe system hinges upon the understanding and implementation of the following principles:

1. Humans are fallible – they make mistakes that can lead to crashes.
2. The human body has a limited physical ability to tolerate crash forces before harm occurs.
3. A shared responsibility exists among those who design, build, manage & use roads & vehicles & provide post-crash care to prevent crashes resulting in serious injury or death.
4. All parts of the system must be strengthened to multiply their effects; so if one part fails, road users are still protected.



Contacts Us

Email roadwise@walga.asn.au

Website www.roadwise.asn.au/contact-roadwise.aspx

Image: The Safe System Approach, source: International Transport Forum.