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Developing the ASEAN Regional Road Safety Strategy

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Abstract

In 2011, more than 75,000 people died in road crashes in the ten member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and many times this number sustained long term injuries. Improving road safety outcomes in ASEAN is not only important for the welfare and economic benefit of these countries, but given that a significant proportion of the world's population lives in ASEAN, it will strongly influence whether the aims of the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety and the Sustainable Development Goals are reached. For this reason, the Asian Development Bank, funded by the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction, has funded a package of action to improve road safety in ASEAN, including the development of a regional road safety strategy. The diversity of the member nations of ASEAN poses significant challenges for the development of the strategy. For example, the road fatality rates per 100,000 population in Malaysia and Thailand are about 5 times greater than in Singapore. In addition, the importance of particular road safety issues varies across the ASEAN countries and for countries which are undergoing rapid motorization, the order of importance may change over the life of the strategy. The development of the ASEAN Regional Road Safety Strategy has adopted the five pillars of road safety of the UN Decade of Action but focused on those aspects which are most relevant at the regional level and where a regional approach will support and facilitate actions taken by individual countries.

Introduction

Road trauma has incredible impact on the health and economic growth of all nations. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) estimates that in 2010, 1.24 million people died worldwide from road trauma. Another study has calculated that on a daily basis at least 140,000 people are injured on the world's roads, and 15,000 of these are disabled for life (Sharma, 2008, Al Turki, 2014). Indeed, the deaths attributable to road trauma are estimated to reach 2.4 million fatalities per year by 2030 (WHO, 2013), and road traffic accidents will be the third leading cause of disability-adjusted life years lost worldwide 2020 (Dickinson et al., 2000). The United Nations has recognised the importance of dealing with this problem by announcing 2011-2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety. In 2011, it was estimated that more than 75,000 people died in road crashes in the ten member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam, Laos PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia) and many more sustained long term injuries (WHO, 2013). Improving road safety outcomes in ASEAN is not only important for the welfare and economic benefit of the populations of these countries, but given the proportion of the world's population that lives in ASEAN, it will strongly influence whether the aims of the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety and the Sustainable Development Goals are reached. For this reason, the Asian Development Bank, funded by the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction, has funded a package of actions to improve road safety in ASEAN, including the development of a regional road safety strategy. More details of the package of actions are provided in Klein & Haworth (2015) and Sann, Haworth & King (2015).

Each one of the ASEAN countries has reached different levels of maturity in its response to road trauma. The UNDoA has proposed 5 pillars of road safety which provide a useful framework for road safety strategies at the global, regional and national levels: road safety management, safer road

and mobility, safer vehicles, safer road users and post-crash response. There has also been a realisation that, within this overall framework, there are particular actions that are best suited to implementation at the global, regional and national levels. It is proposed that the key Strategic Directions for the ASEAN Regional Road Safety Strategy should focus on those aspects which are most relevant at the regional level and where a regional approach will support and facilitate actions taken by individual countries.

Road safety in the ASEAN context

Road trauma is particularly high in low- and middle-income countries, accounting for 91% of the total road fatalities occurring in road crashes (Ameratunga et al., 2006). To date, high-income regions such as Europe and Australia experience approximately 8.7 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants annually, whilst middle-income regions such as Latin America have a higher rate of 20.1 (WHO, 2013). Furthermore, in 2020, road traffic accidents will be the second leading cause of disability-adjusted life years lost in developing countries (Dickinson et al., 2000). The economic and geographic diversity among the ASEAN nations is evident also in road safety outcomes. The road fatality rate per 100,000 population in Malaysia and Thailand is about 5 times greater than in Singapore. The Singaporean road fatality rate in (3.8) is similar to that of the world's best performing nations (Netherlands (3.9) and the United Kingdom (3.1)). The Global Status Report on Road Safety (WHO, 2013) has identified that road trauma is generally higher in middle income countries and still increasing – this is also true in ASEAN. Low income countries (such as Myanmar and Cambodia) generally have lower rates of motorization and so lower fatality rates expressed in terms of population (although the per vehicle rates can be extreme). Unless strong action is taken, economic development in these countries will be accompanied by increasing deaths and injuries on their roads.

The rapid pace of change in some ASEAN countries means that the Regional Road Safety Strategy needs to focus on future issues, as well as the current situation. For some countries increasing motorization may mean that the challenge is to reduce the likely future increase in road trauma, rather than attempting to achieve absolute reductions.

The importance of particular road safety issues varies across the ASEAN countries. The best approach to dealing with this challenge may be to have a set of priority issues in the regional road safety strategy (e.g. non-use of helmets, then drink driving etc.) and acknowledge that the order of importance of these issues will vary among countries. It is possible that for countries which are undergoing rapid motorization, the order of importance may change over the life of the strategy.

Income levels vary markedly among ASEAN countries. Some higher-cost initiatives may be relevant for only a subset of ASEAN countries at the moment and the focus for the remaining countries may need to be on lower-cost solutions. For some initiatives, it may be possible to develop lower-cost alternatives (as has occurred for motorcycle helmets). In addition, disparate income levels exist within countries. It is also important to consider whether some road safety initiatives may lead to loss of income or access to resources by the poor and disadvantaged. For example, banning or restricting the use of unsafe means of transportation which are mainly used by the poor may hamper their access to employment or education. There may be a need for a poverty impact analysis for new road safety programs.

Method

The first step in the development of the ASEAN Regional Road Safety Strategy involved a review of the previous regional strategy and supporting documentation, and strategies and other relevant

documents from individual countries. The review identified the strong disparities in levels of economic development and motorization across the region, accompanied by a lack of consistent data collection across and within many member countries. This led to a decision that the strategy should focus on bringing about improvement relative to baseline in each country, rather than setting the same target for each country. The review outcomes also suggested that a semi-qualitative approach towards describing current practices and monitoring improvement would allow measurement across all countries, even those which currently have poor data systems. Therefore, a star rating system for behavioural factors (to parallel star ratings for vehicles and roads) was proposed by the first author and refined by feedback from national representatives at the ASEAN Train the Trainer Workshop in Manila in June 2014. Further input on safety issues in each of the ASEAN nations was also collected as part of a two-day training workshop on Urban Road Safety in Manila in September 2014.

Role and structure of the regional road safety strategy

ASEAN is a unique sub-region, with some countries belonging to other organisations such as the Asia Pacific Economic Forum (APEC), and UNESCAP. In terms of the ASEAN structure, road safety is particularly relevant to Transport Ministers, Senior Officers, the Land Transport Working Group and Multi-sector Road Safety Special Working Group (MSRSSWG). The MSRSSWG is charged with the responsibility to mobilise and deliver the RRSS through ASEAN.

The previous ASEAN regional road safety strategy (RRSS) and action plan entitled “Arrive Alive: ASEAN commits to cutting road deaths” covered the period 2005-2010. Since then the road safety and motorization contexts in many of the ASEAN countries have changed and new approaches to improving road safety have been introduced, spurred on by the announcement of the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety. The UNDoA has proposed 5 pillars of road safety which provide a useful framework for road safety strategies at the global, regional and national levels: road safety management, safer road and mobility, safer vehicles, safer road users and post-crash response. There has also been a realisation that, within this overall framework, there are particular actions that are best suited to implementation at the global, regional and national levels.

Given the disparities in current road safety performance and in the availability of resources among the ASEAN members, and the specific responsibilities of the MSRSSWG, it was decided that the key Strategic Directions for the ASEAN Regional Road Safety Strategy should focus on those aspects which are most relevant at the regional level and where a regional approach can be more useful than an individual country approach. These aspects have been identified as:

1. Harmonisation of standards, road rules and legislation
2. Capacity building
3. Knowledge development through research and evaluation
4. Monitoring and reporting progress

These aspects were chosen because they are relevant to all of the ASEAN members (while more specific actions might be relevant to, or feasible for, only some members), they foster collaboration and learning among members, and they can be well-supported by external agencies where needed. The high-level nature of the four aspects allows the regional strategy to function as a strategic framework within which each member nation is able to develop approaches that are appropriate to their culture and the nature of their transport system, rather than proposing a single “one size fits all” approach.

It is important to note that the RRSS is being developed as part of a package of actions to improve road safety in ASEAN, rather than as a stand-alone document. This was a learning from earlier regional strategies, the success of which was considered to have been hampered by the lack of resourcing for building national capacity. Thus the RRSS is being developed in conjunction with train-the-trainer programs for individuals identified as national focal points and the appointment of ADD-funded national consultants to work with government and other organisations to facilitate implementation of road safety measures.

In the draft strategy, these aspects are presented according to the five pillars proposed to guide national road safety plans and activities during the Decade of Action for Road Safety. These pillars are not truly separate and interactions between them can bring about significant benefits. For example, most engineering measures need education to maximise correct use and therefore benefits. Therefore there is a need to work together to integrate the activities undertaken in the different pillars. For each pillar, an overall goal, general considerations, and specific approaches are proposed in the draft strategy.

A summary of the road safety context and issues for each of the ASEAN nations was prepared and included as part of the draft strategy document. Most of the information was derived from the World Health Organization Global Status Report on Road Safety 2013 (WHO, 2013). For each country, the road safety challenges were summarised at the beginning of the section. A description of the geography, demographics, road fatality patterns and institutional capacity for road safety in that country was then provided. In order to compare road safety performance across countries and across pillars, a Road Safety Maturity Index was developed and incorporated into the draft strategy (see Oviedo-Trespalacios & Haworth, 2015 for a description of the Index).

Conclusions

The development of the draft ASEAN regional road safety strategy posed some unique challenges in terms of identifying the optimal approach for a region characterised by diversity in both road safety issues and levels of economic development. The lack of consistent measures of road safety activity and performance led to the need to create new semi-qualitative measures that would not require extensive resources to collect and monitor. Consultation on the draft ASEAN regional road safety strategy is now underway. The section on road safety context and issues in each country will be enhanced by input from national road safety advisors. The revised document will then be considered by ASEAN officials in late 2015 and further development will follow.

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