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## Report Warns Traffic Deaths Hurt Developing Economies

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Traffic accidents that result in deaths are individual tragedies that also hurt a country's economy.

A new report from the World Bank says these deaths are a barrier to economic growth in developing countries.

The report is one of several reports showing that investing in road safety in low- and middle-**income** countries could raise national incomes.

Worldwide, about 1.25 million people die in traffic accidents each year. The report says about 90 percent of those deaths happen in developing countries.

The World Health Organization says that traffic accidents are the leading cause of death worldwide for people between the ages of 15 and 29. That includes crashes that kill people who are walking, riding **bicycles** or other small vehicles.

But World Bank transportation expert Dipan Bose says the issue does not get enough attention. He told VOA, "There is not a lot of **political will** in many low- and middle-income countries to take **definitive** action to reduce road deaths and injuries."

Bose helped write one report that studied five countries: China, India, Thailand, the Philippines and Tanzania. The study used economic models to suggest what each country's economy would gain over a 24-year period if traffic deaths were reduced by half.

He says the results were surprising.

For example, Thailand's high rates of both economic growth and traffic accidents mean that it would have the most to gain. The study suggests that Thailand would increase national incomes by 22 percent if it cut traffic deaths.

Tanzania would have the smallest amount of growth at seven percent. The remaining countries would fall somewhere between seven and 22 percent.

This kind of economic growth is something "no national government can ignore," said Bose. His report "gives the economic story of why it is important to take strong actions on road safety."

The report says there are some very easy ways to reduce traffic injuries. These include enforcing speed limits and **helmet** and **seat belt** laws, as well as fighting against people driving under the influence of alcohol.

But another report from the World Bank and the World Resources Institute suggests drivers are only partly responsible for traffic deaths. It says that city planners and government officials are responsible for building safety into their transportation systems.

Anna Bray Sharpin is with the World Resources Institute and helped write the report.

She told VOA, "If the system's not safe - if people don't have the **opportunity** to cross the road safely, or drive in a safe vehicle - then a small **error** can result in a **fatality**."

For example, she said, many city planners use the same design rules for small streets and highways. Wide roads are designed for greatest possible traffic flow and speed. They are not designed for people riding bicycles or walking. She says people often take risks to try and cross the road.

"And that comes back to this issue of whether this is a personal responsibility, or a co-responsibility between governments and planners and people using the road," she added.

The report offers suggestions for designing safer roads and reducing accidents.

Public transportation, walking and biking reduce the number of cars on the road and the number of accidents.

Creating areas for people to walk on the sides and above roads can keep them out of harm's way. Creating protected areas for bicycle riders to ride alongside cars and other vehicles also increases safety.

On roads in rural areas, the report suggests, using barriers to divide traffic in an effort to prevent crashes.

Bray Sharpin notes that many developing countries are currently planning major projects to improve their roads. This means there is now an opportunity to include safety in planning these roads. She says it will be less costly to do so now rather than later.

“Once these roads are built, they’ll be around for **decades**,” she added. If they do not include safety now, these countries will be stuck with dangerous transportation systems for a very long time.

I’m Pete Musto.

*Steve Baragona reported this for VOA News. Pete Musto adapted it for Learning English. Mario Ritter was the editor.*

*We want to hear from you. How common are traffic accidents in your country? What do you think your government should do to prevent them? Write to us in the Comments Section or on our Facebook page.*

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## Words in This Story

**income** – *n.* money that is earned from work, investments, or business

**bicycle(s)** – *n.* a 2-wheeled vehicle that a person rides by pushing on foot pedals

**political will** – *n.* desire or commitment on the part of a government to establish a policy, especially one which is not immediately successful or popular

**definitive** – *adj.* final and settled

**helmet** – *n.* a hard hat that is worn to protect your head

**seat belt** – *n.* a strap on a vehicle's seat that holds a person in the seat if there is an accident

**opportunity** – *n.* an amount of time or a situation in which something can be done

**error** – *n.* a wrong action or statement

**fatality** – *n.* a death that results from a disaster or accident

**decade(s)** – *n.* a period of 10 years