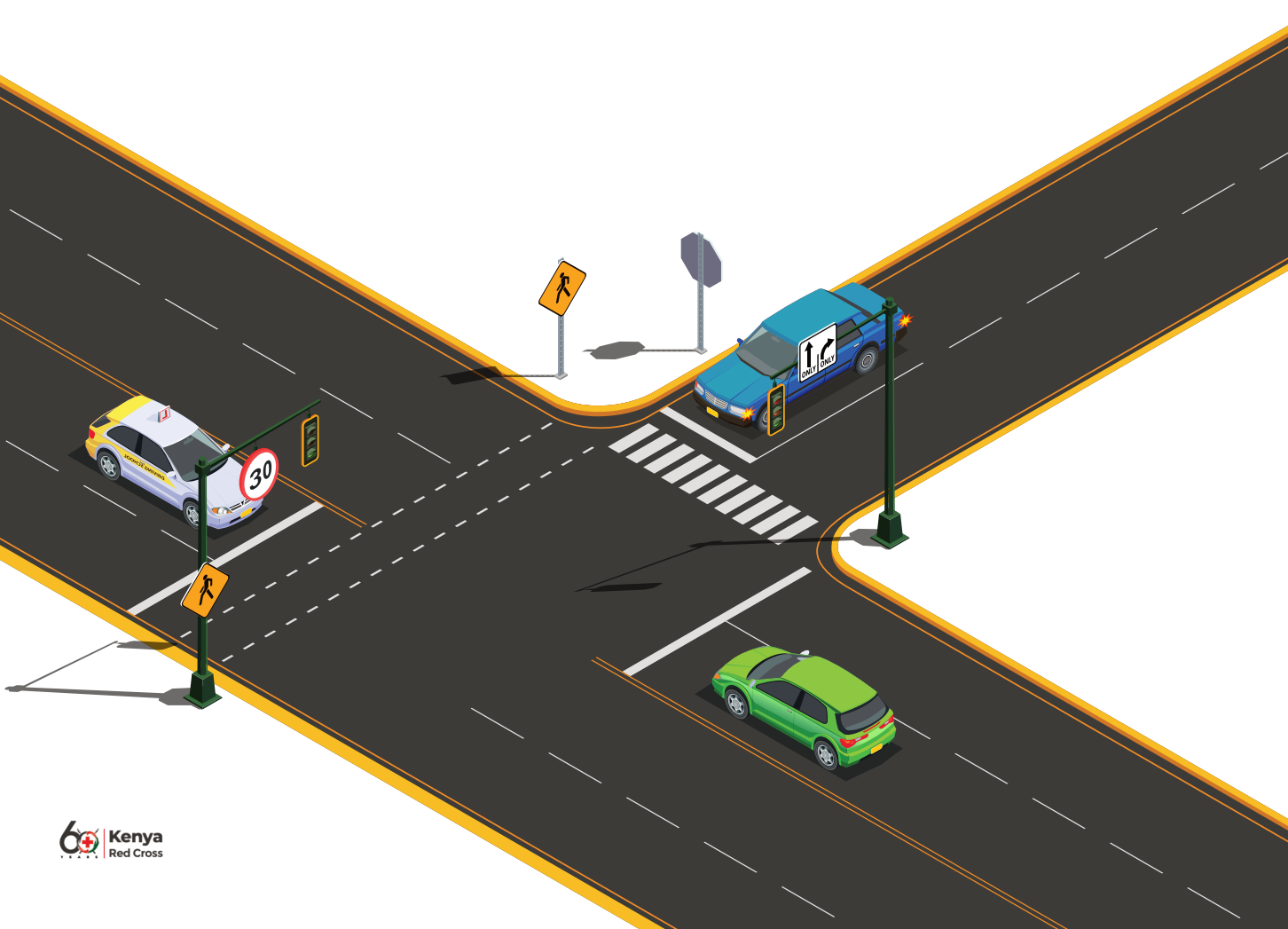


# Slower Speed Safer Streets

*Making walking and cycling safe in Kenya*

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By Natasha Lulia



In September 2020, the UN's Second Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021-2030) was launched, which builds upon the First Decade of Action (2011-2020), whose objective is to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries by 50% according to the Global Plan.

The plan builds on the Safe Systems Approach which places safety at the core of road transport. Within the Plan, the recommended actions include multi-modal transport and land use planning, safe road infrastructure, vehicle safety, safe road use and post-crash response. The plan also highlights requirements for implementation such as financing, speed management, capacity development and inclusion of gender perspective in transport planning, amongst others. It also highlights that road safety is a shared responsibility of various stakeholders including the government, CSOs, academia and the private sector especially in advocating for safe speed management.

Under safe road use, road-user behaviour plays a significant role. The key behavioural risk factors of road safety include drunk driving, speeding and non-use of helmets and seatbelts. According to the 2023 Global Status Report on Road Safety, road traffic deaths stood at 1.19 million globally with the major contributing factor to fatalities and injuries being excessive speed. Out of the total number of deaths, 21% were pedestrians and 5% were cyclists. In Kenya, the National Road Safety Action Plan (2024-2028) identified pedestrians and motorcyclists as the most vulnerable road users, with pedestrians accounting for 35% of fatalities and motorcyclists at 38% including the pillion passengers.

That being the case, effective speed management in areas with high traffic mix is not only a technical adjustment, but also an important public safety intervention to protect the most vulnerable road users.

## Global Context



**1.19**  
million deaths  
globally

**249,000**  
Pedestrians

**59,500**  
Cyclists


## Kenyan Context



Pedestrians account for  
**35% of fatalities**



Cyclists account for  
**5% of fatalities**




Recent studies have shown that the correlation between speed and crash outcomes is exponential; therefore, a slight increase in speed can lead to disproportionately severe consequences, especially in high-speed environments. According to the power law, every 1% increase in average speed results in a 4% increase in the fatal crash risk and a 3% increase in serious crash risk. Conversely, reducing the average speed by 5% can result in a reduction in fatalities by up to 20%. Excessive speeding compromises the safety of pedestrians who are often unprotected or cyclists with limited protection, with its impact being particularly severe in crashes involving pedestrians. These studies continue to underscore the importance of lowering speed limits in areas of mixed traffic flow.

Research also shows that adults have a 90% chance of surviving a collision if the vehicle travels at 30 km/h or less, with some studies suggesting survival rates as high as 99%. However, this probability drops to 50% and 80% at 50 km/h. The risk of fatality increases even more sharply with every kilometre per hour over 30 km/h, with some showing an 11% increase in the chance of pedestrian death for each 1 km/h increase beyond this threshold, with lower odds for children even at the same speed. Given these statistics, there is need for regulatory reforms and enforcement in Kenya's speed limits in high risk areas such as near schools and urban areas where active traffic transport is prevalent and pedestrian traffic is high.

This year the UN Global Road Safety Week emphasizes on making streets safe under the theme of 'Safe Walking

and Cycling.' The main message behind this is that safe walking and cycling contribute to healthy, equitable, and sustainable societies, and it aims to spur action to make these modes of transport safer. A key factor in ensuring the safety of pedestrians and cyclists is reduction and enforcement of lower vehicle speeds in areas of high traffic mix. Lower speed limits create safer environments for NMT, encouraging more people to cycle and walk and this not only reduce the severity of collision, but also makes the streets more accessible thus promoting active mobility.

Locally, led by the National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA) and the Ministry of Roads and Transport, several initiatives have been undertaken to enhance the safety of cyclists and pedestrians. The first is the development of the National Road Safety Action Plan 2024–2028, whose vision is 'safe roads for all users' The plan includes comprehensive infrastructure safety measures, such as the use of International Road Assessment Programme (iRAP) tools to assess high-risk roads and develop Safer Road Investment Plans. It also emphasizes the protection of vulnerable road users through targeted interventions, enforcement of traffic legislation and widespread campaigns to promote responsible road use. Notably, the Action Plan also proposes a 30km/h speed limit in areas where there's high traffic mix with pedestrian and cyclist such as urban areas, school zones, commercial areas and villages. Additionally, Non-Motorized Transport (NMT) initiatives have been advancing, including the construction of dedicated footpaths and cycle tracks.



Despite these initiatives, significant challenges and gaps exist in ensuring the safety of pedestrians and cyclists across Kenya. Data from the NTSA reveals that road traffic crash reporting remains incomplete, hindering effective, evidence-based planning and policy responses. Encroachment on NMT facilities, such as walkways blocked by street vendors or parked vehicles, often forces pedestrians and cyclists into active traffic increasing their risk of traffic injury. The National Road Safety Action Plan also showed that approximately 90% of 697 km of roads assessed lack the Vulnerable Road User (VRU) facilities. Enforcement remains weak due to limited resources, but the recent introduction of speed cameras by NTSA marks a step in the right direction, enabling traffic police to more effectively monitor and address speeding violations. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these tools depends on strong policy implementation, and a sustained shift in public attitudes towards speed management in shared traffic environments.

In strengthening road safety for cyclists and pedestrians in Kenya, several key actions are recommended.

First, there should be reforms in the speed limit from **50km/h to 30 km/h** in high-risk areas where traffic is mixed, such as schools and urban areas, which will significantly reduce the frequency and severity of crashes. Speeding also has a human cost leading to loss of lives and long-term injury.

There is also an urgent need to enact and enforce stronger road safety legislation on the other behavioural risk factors by enforcing legislation on legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limits as per global recommended standards of **0.05 g/dL for the general driving population and 0.02 g/dL for novice and commercial drivers**, and the use of helmets and child restraints.

It is also important to consider the role of attitude and knowledge levels. Certain risk behaviours from VRUs such as crossing roads whilst ignoring or disobeying traffic rules, crossing recklessly and impairment by alcohol and other substances can be traced back to dismissive attitudes or lack of awareness.

Changing this mindset, requires more than law enforcement and calls for a coordinated approach that combines public education, and cultural change. Efforts should focus on high-risk urban areas where vulnerable road users are most exposed. A general deterrence strategy supported by awareness campaigns can help shift public attitudes and establish safe speed norms. Strengthening compliance through improved driver training, licensing, and targeted education, especially for matatu drivers and boda boda operators, is essential. These actions should be part of broader civic education initiatives to promote road safety literacy. Infrastructure improvements must also prioritize the needs of vulnerable and non-motorized users to achieve safe roads for all.

