Fact Sheet: Speed Management

Why Speed Management Matters

- Speed is the most significant risk factor in road traffic crashes, affecting both the likelihood of a crash and its severity.
- In 2021, the World Health Organisation estimated about **1.19 million** people died globally from road traffic injuries, of these, an estimated **259,601 road traffic deaths** occurred across **54 countries** of the African continent, accounting for **24 percent** of the global burden of deaths resulting from road traffic injuries[1].
- Speed affects both energy levels and impact force. The amount of kinetic energy a vehicle has determines the force of impact. Even small increases in speed can significantly heighten road crash risk.
- Although road crashes are not inevitable, they are preventable through safer infrastructure, safer vehicles and road user behaviour.
- Lower speeds also bring additional benefits such as less air pollution, reduced fuel use, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and quieter, more liveable cities[2].

The Safe System Approach

- Recognizes that humans are vulnerable and errant and will make mistakes.
- Roads and vehicles must be designed as a system that anticipates mistakes and keeps crash forces below survivable limits; around 30 km/h for unprotected road users.
- The **30 km/h** Threshold
- **30km/h is recommended as the safe limit** in areas with high interaction between vehicles and vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and children.
- Human bodies can generally only tolerate impact speeds up to approximately 30 km/h before the likelihood of death or serious injury decreases dramatically[3].
- The risk of death is almost five times higher for a pedestrian hit at 50 km/h compared to 30 km/h and at 65 km/h, the pedestrian fatality risk rises dramatically.
- African countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda and Tunisia have already adopted to 30 km/h speed limit in urban centres, school zones, and residential areas.

[1]Africa Status Report on Road Safety 2025, SSATP (World Bank Africa Transport Policy Program), 2025
[2]GRSP Speed Fact Sheet
[3]International Transport Forum (2018), Speed and Crash Risk

Why Speed Increases Risk

- An increase in average speed is directly related both to the likelihood of a crash occurring and to the severity of the consequences of the crash. For example, every 1% increase in mean speed produces a 4% increase in the fatal crash risk and a 3% increase in the serious crash risk.
- Reduced Reaction Time: At higher speeds, drivers have less time to perceive hazards and react.
- Increase in Stopping Distance:
  - At **30 km/h** it takes 12 meters to stop.
  - At **40 km/h** it takes 26 meters to stop.
  - At **50 km/h** it takes 35 meters to stop.
  - At **60 km/h** it takes 45 meters to stop.
- Narrowed Field of Vision: Higher speeds reduce peripheral vision, making it harder to detect pedestrians and cyclists.

Key Messages

- Excessive speed is one of the leading causes of road traffic deaths globally
- Setting and enforcing safe speed limits, particularly 30 km/h in urban areas, is one of the most effective and low-cost interventions to save lives.
- Speed management is both a public health measure and a sustainable development tool, aligned with Africa's Road Safety Action Plan 2021–2030 and the global target of halving road deaths by 2030.

References:

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