

Vison Zero

Vision Zero was first adopted by Sweden in 1997 when the Swedish parliament passed a Road Traffic Safety Bill that wrote Vision Zero into law. The Bill sets a definitive objective of no deaths or serious injuries on Sweden's roads. (Swedish Ministry of Transport and Communications, 1997).

Vision Zero is a different way of thinking about road safety and road crashes. The Swedish believe that there can be no moral justification for anyone dying or being seriously injured just for using the road network.

It could be argued that if we want mobility and freedom it is the price we have to pay. Is there really a price on lives lost on our roads? No one should die just for trying to get from one place to another.

Traditionally, we have always counted crashes or seen crashes as the problem. The reason for the crash in most cases is put down to human factors. This has caused the focus to be very much on changing human behavior to prevent crashes not on protecting the road user.

In Vision Zero, the crash is not the major problem. The problem is that people get killed or seriously injured. It starts with the assumption that the body and mind are human, we must accept that our bodies have tolerance limits and we just make mistakes.

Zero – is it possible, is it achievable?

Yes. Today the number of traffic deaths per 100,000 population in Sweden is half that of Australia and the trend continues to go down. In Australia our road safety performance has stalled. (Inquiry into the National Road Safety Strategy 2011 – 2020)

In Sweden, planning has played the biggest part in reducing crashes. Roads are built or modified with safety as a priority over speed or mobility. They have implemented low speed-limits in urban areas with high numbers of pedestrians and installed barriers that separate cars from oncoming traffic and vulnerable road users. In 2012 only one child under seven died on Swedish roads compared with 58 in 1970. (The Economist, 2014)

Unfortunately, we have a road traffic system that was designed for maximum capacity and mobility - not safety! Governments, road authorities and treasuries struggle to deal with this legacy and to change many of the outdated policies, practices and designs used to create the system. The connection between the costs of road trauma and the existing solutions are not being made. (Inquiry into the National Road Safety Strategy 2011 – 2020)

Making zero possible will involve a commitment to changing our whole transport planning philosophy and how we design and manage future traffic systems to one that simply doesn't allow road users to take risks way beyond their human capacity or cause death or serious injury simply by making a mistake.

Zero can only be achieved if there is a belief that it's possible and a paradigm shift in thinking from: "*crashes are inevitable and deaths and serious injuries are a price we pay for mobility and freedom*", to "*the only acceptable number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads is zero*".

No loss of life on our roads is acceptable.