Municipal policy makers regularly have questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of their policy. Benchmarking can provide a method for this assessment: comparing the performance of their municipality with similar others, identifying learning points, and applying them in one’s own environment. Although municipal benchmarks have been present in the Netherlands for many years on various policy fields, and in recent years, road safety benchmarks have been developed on international level to compare the achievements of EU countries, a municipal road safety benchmarking for the Netherlands has never been developed.

SWOV has developed and implemented a road safety benchmark together over the last few years, in close cooperation with nine municipalities, the Dutch Traffic Safety Association and the Dutch Cyclists’ Union. The benchmark consists of a process framework, a ‘golden standard’ for indicators to be used in the benchmark and a webbased benchmark tool containing available data for benchmarking municipalities.

The framework of the process steps starts with determining the need to benchmark and forming a benchmarking team, then determining the benchmark topic and relevant indicators, collecting data and identify the best in class before finally identifying success factors and lessons to be learned.

For the ‘golden standard’, we used the input-throughput-output-outcome cycle and defined items for each level. For instance, on the input level, budget and ambitions were measured, problem analysis and monitoring were measured for the throughput level, the output level consisted of road safety measures taken by the municipalities and the outcome level contained speed and quality of the infrastructure as well as the more traditional measure for road safety: fatalities and serious road injuries.

After implementing this golden standard in nine pilot municipalities, the municipalities were positive about the benchmark, especially about the exchange of success factors on road safety and lessons to learn from each other. The data collection in the benchmark, carried out mostly by the municipalities themselves, appeared to be a severe problem. On the input and throughput level, the long term data (2000-2013) of most indicators could be collected. However, the data on measures taken (output level) was in most cases only available through the memory of the municipal policy makers and not in databases. On the outcome level, data on speeding and quality of the infrastructure was hardly available at all, and available data was not collected in a comparable way. Data on fatalities and serious injured were available from national databases. The implementation of the benchmark increased the awareness of the lack of data in the four municipalities.

To identify key success factors for implementing the benchmark on a larger scale, a document analysis on twelve Dutch benchmarks in other policy fields, (such as benchmarks on sewage systems, domestic waste, home care and the welfare system) was held. The results show that most successful municipal benchmarks, defined as benchmarks with many participants (more than one third of the municipalities participating), used data readily available through mandatory municipal accountability processes. Such mandatory accountability process is not (yet) available for road safety. Furthermore, these successful benchmarks compare mostly executive tasks on which municipalities hope to save money. The results of the document study were validated for the road safety field through interviews with stakeholders.
The above mentioned key success factors are not present in the road safety field: road safety has no mandatory accountability process and it is not a mainly executive task, but a policy task. Therefor, to implement the road safety benchmark on a larger scale, we developed a webbased benchmark tool based solely on nationwide available municipal road safety data, ranging from road deaths to cycling infrastructure and from civilian complaints on road safety to budgets. In the coming years, cooperation with other partners will be sought to improve and extent the incorporated data and to investigate effective implementation methods.