

Vision Zero and Safe System Approach for Iceland?

“Vision Zero” is a traffic safety policy whose aim it is to reduce the number of fatal accidents to zero, so that no person will die as a consequence of a traffic accident in the near future. For several decades Sweden has been among the leading countries with respect to traffic safety, and was the first to pass a law incorporating Vision Zero, in 1997. Since then, both Finland and Norway have passed similar laws.

Vision Zero has the advantage of being explicit regarding the end result of traffic safety work. However, Vision Zero contains no specific and detailed procedures, over and above what is contained in official traffic safety plans. Vision Zero has been the subject of considerable debate during the last decade, which has awakened the interest of many people in further reducing the number of those seriously injured or killed in traffic accidents. Accordingly, several other countries have taken up traffic safety policies that are in many ways similar to Vision Zero. Thus, for example, there is the "Safe System Approach", which contains well-defined traffic safety measures, and also insists on the inclusion of a Vision Zero in official planning and decision processes.

Such a policy is also recommended here. It would entail an official agreement to incorporate into the design of the road system, an explicit aim that no one would be in danger of serious injury or death in road traffic accidents, given, of course, that road users follow set rules. It is also important to improve speed regulation on roads throughout the country, by regulating speed limits and surveillance. The introduction of a Safe System is inevitably accompanied by some initial costs, especially in Iceland, where the road system is long and incomplete. This is will be remedied in stages.

Vision Zero is not a new concept, and is already present in this country in other sectors than road traffic. Thus, through an emphasis on this form of vision, an impressive level of accident reduction has been achieved with respect to air traffic, at sea, and in work places. Institutions and municipalities can also set up their own versions of Zero Vision.

The work group proposes that Vision Zero be adopted in matters concerning road traffic in Iceland, and that time-limited objectives be set up to work towards the Vision in a systematic way:

(i) Ongoing traffic safety work should be continued, with the addition that it becomes the chief objective in the communication sector; (ii) the control system for traffic safety should be strengthened and coordination and information exchange improved; (iii) an official committee should be set up to ensure the effective implementation of the Vision Zero and Safe System Approach. The committee should oversee the attainment of the different stages of the Vision and ensure the implementation of important decisions.

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