

The Safe System approach to road safety



Creating a forgiving road system

Why we need a Safe System

The Safe System approach works on the principle that it is not acceptable for a road user to be killed or seriously injured if they make a mistake.

Research from Scandinavia and South Australia shows that even if all road users complied with road rules, fatalities would only fall by around 50% and injuries by 30%. So if everyone obeyed the road rules, New Zealand would still have more than 130 deaths on the road each year.

The Safe System approach looks beyond the driver. It identifies and addresses all the causes of crash trauma because serious crashes are system failures. A more forgiving system means that when someone makes a mistake it is less likely to result in loss of life or limb.

What a Safe System looks like

A safe road system means that all parts of the system will be much safer than they are now. For example:

Vehicles will have advanced safety features, including electronic stability control, front and side curtain airbags and better maintenance of tyres and brakes.

Roads and roadsides will be safer because the planning and design will make them more forgiving of errors. Surfaces will be improved and roadside hazards removed or barriers installed.

Speed will be managed to survivable levels through a wide range of techniques such as greater use of technology and speed limits that are appropriate for the road.

Road users will be alert and aware of the risks, and drive or ride to the conditions.

Who is involved in the implementation of the Safe System approach?

In New Zealand the approach is led by the National Road Safety Committee (NRSC), a group of government agencies with responsibilities for road safety. The NZ Transport Agency is one of these agencies.

The NRSC agencies work with many organisations within the public and private sector with an interest in safety to help make our road system more forgiving. People involved include planners, engineers, policy makers, enforcement officers, insurers, suppliers, vehicle importers, asset managers, fleet managers, utility companies and the media. We need everyone to play their part and do what they can to keep themselves, and others, safe on the road.

As well as asking
'Why did that driver crash into the power pole?'

We now ask
'Why does that power pole need to be there and how can it be made safer?'

How the Safe System approach will result in safer journeys

Safer Journeys: New Zealand's Road Safety Strategy 2010 - 2020 has a vision of a safe road system increasingly free of death and serious injury.

This vision challenges everyone to change the way we think about road safety and the way we work together to make journeys on New Zealand's roads safer for everyone. It recognises that serious road trauma is preventable.

the 4 Safe System principles

The Safe System approach aims to create a forgiving road system based on four principles:

- 1 People make mistakes**
We need to recognise that people make mistakes and some crashes are inevitable. But what we don't accept is that death or serious injury from crashes is inevitable.
- 2 People are vulnerable**
Our bodies have a limited ability to withstand crash forces without being seriously injured or killed. Crash forces need to be kept to survivable levels.
- 3 We need to share responsibility**
System designers and people who use the roads must all share responsibility for creating a road system where crash forces do not result in death or serious injury.
- 4 We need to strengthen all parts of the system**
We need to improve the safety of all parts of the system - roads and roadsides, speeds, vehicles, and road use so that if one part fails, other parts will still protect the people involved.

We need to work together to make journeys on New Zealand roads safer for everyone.