



Policy Brief

PAC/SL/PB4/11/2021

November 2021

Suggestions for the National Transportation Policy in line with the MVA, 2019

Rahul Das

"Faster roads are not always safer roads - and virtually all societies, democratic or authoritarian, prefer safety over speed, even if many of their citizens enjoy fast driving."

Evgeny Morozov
American Writer

The Context

The World Economic Forum (WEF) recently mentioned that India has the fastest-growing cities in the world. While several social, economic and political mechanisms play a role in this growth, the population increase acts as the focal point. The combined population growth of Tier 1 cities in India between 1951 and 2021 (70 years) has been more than 700 per cent. The city of Bengaluru, say, for example, witnessed an increase in population from 29 lakhs in 1981 to a staggering 127 lakhs as of 2021 (World Population Review, 2021). Due to this substantial increase in the population of the city, the vehicle population also increased to around 80 lakhs in 2019 as compared to a mere 3 lakhs in 1981 (Deccan Herald, 2019). This huge growth in vehicular population, coupled with improper land use in the city, weak urban planning, and poor road engineering has resulted in several challenges on city roads, such as traffic congestion, increase in journey time, pollution and road accidents. This scenario is also true for other Indian cities as well.

While there exist several interventions and measures in place to ensure traffic and road safety, the Government of India amended the Indian Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act (MVA) of 1988, in September 2019 to provide an additional regulatory framework to traffic movement on roads. Given that a considerable period has passed since the amendment, it is probably then the right time to reflect upon and question the implementation challenges of this Act at the State as well as at the Central level. It is important to identify the issues of such policy interventions that may exist within the different stakeholders related to the transportation and road safety framework. Further, there exists an urgent need for policy suggestions, as well as targeted amendments in the State and Central rules, to bring in new road safety-related policies. This write-up is a policy-based suggestive note towards the envisaged National Transportation Policy as mentioned in the MVA, 2019.

The Question

In line with the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, what are the structural and institutional gaps that should be addressed, to develop a comprehensive, sustainable and dynamic policy framework (National Transportation Policy) to improve mobility on Indian roads?



Policy Brief

PAC/SL/PB4/11/2021

November 2021

The Problem

All State Governments in India, as well as local governments within the States, have introduced several procedures, policies and innovative methods to control traffic movements and ensure improved road safety. Added to this, the MVA, of 1988 was amended in 2019 to supplement support to the already existent State laws related to traffic regulations. While these efforts by the Central and State Governments have been well acknowledged by policymakers, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), etc., not all States have completely implemented the modified Act; only 5 States in India (Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Kerala, Karnataka, and Assam), have partially adopted the Act. Further, these were implemented only after the reduction of minimum traffic fines. While these are the primary issues, the Act, also, has a few shortcomings and fails to mention and address some specific issues related to road safety, and its supporting infrastructure.

To begin with, the Act lacks the mention of road safety networks and regulations, however, no specific focus is given to rural regions. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) mentions that worldwide, in 2019, the rate of crash deaths per 100 million miles travelled was about 2 times as high in rural areas as in urban areas (1.66 in rural areas compared with 0.86 in urban areas). In India, as well, a higher number of deaths takes place on rural roads as compared to urban roads. Thus, the mention of specific regulations, laws, and rural road safety measures, such as critical trauma care, first aid, etc., have not been indicated at any point in the MVA, 2019. Thus, a part of the infrastructure interventions, as mentioned by the Government could be effectively channelised to improve road safety in rural regions.

Over speeding has been a major reason for the deaths on Indian roads, however, the mention of any specific speed limit has not been mentioned in the MVA, 2019. While fines and penalties are charged for over speeding, this enforcement is not stringent in all States. Also, these regulations are limited only to major roads, and highways, while traffic officers fail to keep adequate vigilance on arterial roads. This leads to higher accidents. The issue further intensifies due to added problems like non-helmet driving, triple riding etc. However, the MVA, 2019 has introduced heavy charges for these issues, technical interventions can be made to limit driving speeds, especially for specific vehicles. While the speed limits may vary based on different road stretches, the present maximum speed limit for cars, as notified by the Ministry of Road Transports and Highways (MRTH), is 100 kmph on national highways and 120 kmph on expressways. The speed limit on highways and expressways is 80 kmph for bikes and 100 kmph for heavy vehicles such as buses and trucks.

While over speeding, and drunk driving have been the highest cause of road fatalities, poor road engineering, designs, and quality have also led to accidents. Specifications for the importance of road maintenance and quality check has been a critical issue that has not been highlighted in the MVA, 2019. These can be ensured through capacity building of road safety engineers, traffic officers, public works officers, and all other relevant stakeholders, working directly on road safety.

The use of data in the details pertaining to MVA, 2019 has been very limited. This problem has been seen through the lack of any demand-based analysis while determining the exorbitant rates that have been imposed through the Act in the form of penalties, charges, fees, etc for traffic violations. There are several pieces of evidence, that have



Policy Brief

PAC/SL/PB4/11/2021

November 2021

The Solution

indicated protests in some States due to the hefty fines that were introduced with the amendment in the Act. These fines were then revised, and a new set of reduced charges were issued. Further, as mentioned above, not all States have introduced the Act, and as a result, only a handful of State agencies are eligible to charge the rates leading to enforcement as well as a revenue-generation challenge.

The problems mentioned above may be dealt with in a targeted manner based on the following points mentioned below.

1. Improve road infrastructure on rural roads: While a higher number of accidents takes place in rural regions (on highways, expressways, etc.), especially due to the inter-state, or inter-city connectivity being through rural regions, the focus should be given to the following,
 - Road infrastructure in rural regions should be prioritised equally as in the urban space
 - Improved connectivity between rural and urban regions for provision of better first aid, and initial care. This is considering the fact that the majority of hospitals, nursing homes are situated in urban regions
 - Efficient coordination between rural and urban governance systems such as in terms of planning, implementation, and enforcement of road safety measures.
2. Quality Check Optimisation: While the PWD has been conducting periodic road inspections, a majority of the accidents happen due to poor road maintenance, and inadequate road designs. The Department of Traffic Police, Transport Department and the PWD must allocate special officers for the purpose of inspection on a daily basis. This should be focused on regions which are termed 'Traffic Black Spots', on highways, expressways, etc. where there are chances of high-speed vehicles, and heavy vehicular traffic increasing chances of road accidents.
3. Periodic training and capacity building is a necessary activity for all stakeholders related to road safety, with participants both from the service providers, as well as the end-users. Service providers may include different road safety enforcement officers, traffic police, officers from the PWD, etc. End-users may include individuals who are related to any policy on road safety, civil society organisations, principals of colleges, high schools, students, young working professionals, etc. The training may state facts, and provide causes of road accidents, and ways to avoid them. Targeted action to change the perception of road users, and create awareness, improve sensitisation on the importance of pedestrians on the road is a topic that should be discussed in detail.
4. An important aspect that causes the majority of road accidents is the lack of helmets worn by riders and pillions riders. While this is enforced strictly with fines and charges on Very Heavy and Heavy Traffic roads, Low traffic roads are often ignored. An optimised Police Patrolling may be encouraged in this regard on minor arterial roads. Cities such as Kolkata, and Delhi have indicated high vigilance from traffic police officials. The systems used by these can be replicated in other cities as well.

The introduction of an upper limit on vehicle speed limits should also be considered for all streets within the city limits where the density of pedestrians is very high. While such specifications exist, they are not enforced strictly. The traffic and road safety departments may consider an upper limit for vehicles on arterial as well as non-arterial roads.

Policy Brief

PAC/SL/PB4/11/2021

November 2021

5. Adoption, replication and scalability of best practices within the country should be encouraged. For example, the road safety infrastructure by the State of Tamil Nadu is one of the best in the country, where the emphasis is placed on trauma care, and taking the injured to the hospitals at the earliest. Thus, ensuring the 3-Es of road safety, i.e., Engineering, Enforcement and Education, through proper regulation in transport can generate substantial advantages.
6. The overall goal of the government while ensuring road safety should be to have an efficient and seamless inter-institutional linkage between the several departments who work on road safety issues. Thus, PWD, Highway Authority, State Transport, Traffic Department and the State police should all work in tandem with each other.

The Conclusion

Thus, the focus of the National Transportation Policy should not be to develop new modes and methods of road transport, but on improving the efficiency of existing infrastructure. The priority should be on 3 key areas; improved regulations in the existing transport framework, promotion of non-motorised modes of transport, and enhancement of the inter-institutional linkage between stakeholders in the transport sector.

While effective implementation is a challenge for every policy by the Government, periodic dialogue and consultation between stakeholders can generate ideas, and facilitate the development of policy recommendations for improved execution, and positive outcomes. Thus, the primary objective of the Government should not only be limited to support the development of plans by policy-makers but also to implement these evidence-based road safety policies on behavioural risk factors. While the focus should be on achieving short-term targets, implementation challenges will exist due to the prolonged gestation lag between introduction and evidence of the outcome from such policies. Thus, success will only be ensured, if policies fulfil long-term objectives in a sustainable manner.

The Author



Rahul Das, Programme Officer, Public Affairs Centre, His research interest areas include climate change, urban environment, green finances, sustainable livelihood, and urban policy research.