

DAVID WARD

FIA Foundation's
David Ward
owes his own
survival
to strong
politicians
making the case
for seatbelts to
be standard-fit
technology

Political gain

Following a highly successful first Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety, the FIA Foundation's David Ward is hoping governmental action over the next decade will speak louder than words

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Although it is easy and on occasion possibly even satisfying to denigrate politicians, their role in the road safety arena is hugely important. "Political commitment is key," agrees David Ward, director general of the FIA Foundation, as he reflects on November's Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Moscow. "The decisions politicians make now and over the next 10 years will have an impact on people's lives for decades to come."

Attracting 1,500 ministerial delegates from 120 countries around the world, the focus of this particular high-level assembly was the next 10 years – a 'Decade of Action' – and five million lives. That's how many people road experts believe can be saved by 2020 if the right road safety strategies and technologies are adopted.

The Moscow Declaration, one of three major developments to come out of the Ministerial, saw governments committing to the Decade of Action – a 10-year road safety action plan for

developing countries, where 90% of the 1.3 million fatalities and 50 million injuries in road traffic crashes occur each year. Failure to curb this epidemic, a humanitarian catastrophe, will see the death toll double by 2030, according to the World Health Organization.

Back to basics

We don't need miracles to achieve the goals set out in the Decade of Action, though. These are basic and cost-effective measures that can have an extraordinary and priceless impact. We're talking about dealing with factors such as speeding and drink-driving, encouraging seatbelt usage, child restraints and motorcycle helmets. It's about the replenishment of older, unsafe vehicles and enhancing poorly designed or insufficiently maintained roads, while protecting vulnerable users. We're talking about a more concerted effort in terms of traffic legislation, political awareness and addressing post-trauma care. It's not a cure for cancer nor is it finding life in the outer echelons of the solar system.

Post-Moscow, there is optimism about the future. "Most people in

politics are motivated to try to make the world a better place – and what better way to do that than to support the Decade of Action?" asks Ward. In the words of Lord Robertson, chairman of the Commission for Global Road Safety, the Moscow Ministerial was "a turning point for global road safety". As well as the Declaration and the Decade of Action as proposed by the Commission's Make Roads Safe campaign being approved and endorsed, the World Bank and six multilateral development banks (in Africa, Europe, the Americas, Asia and the Islamic regions) issued a Statement of a Shared Approach to Managing Road Safety, meaning the issue will be a priority in their operations. "Each year they are spending some US\$4 billion on building roads and maintenance and rehabilitation of existing roads," Ward reports. "We've been arguing that they should make sure investment is better targeted to road safety and quality-assured to ensure they're not actually making situations worse." Quite often, he goes on to explain, road infrastructure improvements actually raise vehicle

speed, so new roads end up having a worse crash profile than before. “The statement from the banks is quite strong and if it translates into real action over the next decade, project by project, it’ll be very good indeed.”

Lord Robertson’s Commission has been calling for a US\$300 million fund for the proposed Decade of Action. And in Moscow there were some significant financial pledges towards that goal, most notably a US\$125 million donation from the Bloomberg Philanthropies – the largest single donation ever to road safety. “This is great news because, I’m pleased to say, it means for the first time that the FIA Foundation is no longer the largest donor,” Ward adds. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s money will go towards a five-year programme focusing on 10 low- and middle-income countries that between them represent 48% of traffic deaths globally. “We at the FIA Foundation also made a commitment of US\$10 million to the International Road Assessment Programme (iRAP), which gives them security they’re going to keep going for the next decade. Also, the UK government pledged £1.5 million to the World Bank Global Road Safety Facility, so all in all we’re almost halfway there. The next stage for the Commission of Global Road Safety and the Make Roads Safe campaign is to persuade other big foundations – particularly in health – to help us reach the US\$300 million.”



David Ward and Make Roads Safe campaign ambassador Michelle Yeoh meet with Bill Clinton in New York

Ward and his campaign cohorts have been pushing the health sector to realise that road safety is a health problem, as well as being a very relevant development issue. “It’s been sidelined as a development issue,” Ward suggests. “In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals were set and focused on things such as malaria and TB, which are important, but road safety was overlooked. It’s an issue that too often falls through the cracks; nobody wants to own it. And it’s often seen only to be a transport or a policing issue so might be off the radar of the health and development communities.”

Opinions of safety

In Moscow, Kevin Watkins from the Global Economic Governance Programme at Oxford University (formerly director of the UN Human Development Report Office and prior to that head of research at Oxfam UK) delivered what Ward felt was a particularly thought-provoking

presentation about this very issue. “He [Watkins] said that until recently he had never thought about road safety from a development point of view, but he’s now woken up to it and he’s challenging development agencies to realise that good and safe mobility is part of the development process and shouldn’t be ignored. If you want to raise children’s attendance at schools and access to healthcare, and things around developing villages, etc., then actually how they get around safely is a very critical part of the issue.”

Ward predicts that if road safety continues to be overlooked, despite the likely level of investment in transport infrastructure over the next decade, the result will be a highly counterproductive increase in road casualties, ultimately placing a huge burden on the health system. “In some countries, up to 50% of hospital beds in casualty departments are being filled by road traffic victims,” he reveals. “Those who survive crashes but suffer disabilities become an ongoing burden on society. People also don’t appreciate that road crashes are often the tipping point into poverty. If a breadwinner is seriously injured or killed, families lose their support mechanism. These are powerful stories that we must highlight to get the Make Roads Safe message through to the public.”

President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia, the most senior of the politicians present at the Ministerial, stimulated delegates with some of his own thoughts on road safety, providing comments that even Ward hadn’t considered. “President Medvedev said that all nations had been concerned with the global recession and loss of GDP, but year in, year out, countries are losing 1-3% as a result of road traffic crashes. It’s like an economic downturn every year and we just ignore it. A similar point can be made in relation to diseases. If there was an outbreak of a bug that started killing a million people a year, there would be an immediate and global response. With road crashes, there’s a huge economic cost and a huge health cost and yet we sort of tolerate it.”

So why is road safety seemingly invisible? “People’s sense of risk in transport is quite confused,” Ward feels. “We are much more concerned about flying or travelling on trains, when the real risk is out on the road.” Another problem he pinpoints is that road safety is quite complex from a

Politicians can be heroes

David Ward considers himself a road safety success story. Back in 1973, aged 18, he was a passenger in a Mini involved in a serious frontal impact with a Ford Escort. “I was wearing my seatbelt because of two things,” he recalls. “In 1967, the then Minister of Transport, Barbara Castle, introduced a law requiring cars to have seatbelts as standard.” Unbelievably, Ward says, this was met with strong opposition from other members of parliament at the time, so Castle had to fight hard to have it pushed through. “Her government and successive

governments ran the ‘Clunk Click Every Trip’ campaign,” Ward continues. “The combination of those two things encouraged me to wear mine, and 10 minutes into this journey we had our crash. I remember being amazed looking at the bruising across my chest. The Doctor said, ‘There you go, without your seatbelt I wouldn’t be talking to you now.’”

These powerful advertisements – which you can view online by searching for ‘Clunk Click Every Trip’ – helped lay the groundwork for compulsory seatbelt use in the front seats of vehicles, which in the UK came into force on January 31, 1983. Castle also introduced alcohol breathalysers and the 70mph limit on motorways in the UK. A non-driver, she later became Baroness Castle of Blackburn, before passing away in 2002 at the age of 91. Ward adds, “It’s not an exaggeration to say that I owe my survival to decisions made by politicians like Barbara Castle.”



Belting up in the 1972 campaign featuring DJ Jimmy Saville

managerial point of view. “Intrinsically it’s multisector. No single government department can deal with it alone. It involves coordinating the police, health and local authorities, and that’s hard, particularly for governments in emerging countries where their administrative capacity is faced with many different challenges.”

Ward also feels the transport sector has not been terribly good itself, especially alongside other issue groups such as environmental health. “Hopefully, that’s something we have brought to the whole process,” he says. “The FIA Foundation and the Make Roads Safe campaign have been very political, with a small ‘p’, about what we’ve been trying to do. We’ve employed tactics similar to other campaigns by getting celebrities involved, with mass-orientated campaigning to make the issue political

Technology talk

» Although ESC will be mandatory within the next few years on all new cars in North America, Europe and Australia, David Ward suggests there’s no reason why countries such as China and India shouldn’t follow suit quickly. “Every vehicle you put on the road now without that technology will be on the road for 15 years,” he says. “That’s an avoidable risk of injury when we know that an ESC-equipped car is around 25% safer and less likely to be in a crash. And although automatic emergency braking systems haven’t been verified as yet in terms of their effectiveness, any technology that wipes out 10, 15 or 20% of the pre-crash energy before an impact is a big safety plus. There are a lot of exciting prospects.”

Importantly, Ward would like to see the automotive industry as a collective do a better job of explaining the benefits of such systems,



ESC in action at the eSafety Challenge in Rome

particularly through the manufacturers’ dealerships. “There’s a lot of evidence that the customer simply doesn’t understand what these systems are capable of. We’d also like to see such technologies deployed on smaller vehicle classes more quickly. Governments can regulate, of course, but they can also use incentives. Denmark offered a fiscal incentive a few years ago for cars equipped with ESC and in no time at all they got to around 90% fitment.”

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rather than technical. The problem with transport is that the engineers involved love to provide technical solutions, but what you need is political engagement first, which creates a mandate for innovation in the technical areas as required.”

Challenges

Given that Ward predicts one of the biggest challenges – and not just in the low- and middle-income countries – will be technical capacity, he admits to being surprised that the big development institutions such as the World Bank and regional development banks have very few road safety experts available to them. “We need to invest more in the technical skills of project leaders in this area, giving people the confidence that there’s a career path they can take and that it’s rewarding and going to be well financed. It’s a practical thing: people won’t sign up to work in road safety engineering and management unless they feel it is a growing area that they can personally benefit from in terms of a fulfilling career. We hope that the ‘Decade’ will inspire people to commit to this area. Management capacity is a key issue.”

In the industrialised countries, Ward refers to a painful learning curve,



At the Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety, Ward urges transport ministers to act

suggesting that it’s taken far longer than it should have to reduce the road death toll. “In the UK, it’s quite a success to have dropped below 3,000, but there’s a lot more to be done,” he says. “We have to appreciate that Vision Zero is not a target of zero deaths, it’s acknowledging that roads should be designed so that, as far as possible, the consequences of a crash are likely to be non-fatal. But what’s interesting about Vision Zero, of course, is that in some places in Sweden they’ve actually done it! There are parts of the network now where there are zero deaths, whereas a few years ago there were quite a few. I think that shows that if you have a high level of ambition, you can achieve a great deal. Maybe in the UK it’s not realistic to think of zero road deaths,

but we should be aiming for big efforts in improving intrinsic road design and vehicle safety, and encouraging a very high level of public acceptance, particularly in targeted groups. The UK, for instance, is still quite poor in terms of child safety, so I don’t suppose it would be too difficult to mobilise public opinion to crack down on that.”

Overall, though, Ward feels the overwhelming challenge is the political will to follow through, which is why he is buoyant about events in Moscow. “If you take the high level of participation, the new financial resources and the joint statement from the banks, that’s a pretty important series of ticked boxes,” he says. “There was a feeling – far greater than I have sensed before – that road safety is at last a political priority. We hope the Decade will sustain that and we move through a threshold where it becomes self-sustaining in as many countries as possible.

“Once the programmes are in place and you start to build safer roads with safer cars on them – and you improve the level of police enforcement – you tend to reach a critical mass where public acceptance and resources will be higher as you’re not dealing with a lot of avoidable injuries and clearing up crashes. That’s the ambition and it’s a big challenge, but we’ll give it our best shot.” ◀

For further information about the Commission for Global Road Safety and the Make Roads Safe campaign, please visit www.makeroadssafe.org