Safe travel—a worthwhile destination

In Malaysia an improvement in the public transport system could be expected to reduce the toll of death and injury on the country’s roads and to bring substantial economic and environmental gains.

Road accidents are an increasing problem in Malaysia. In 1989 they caused 3773 deaths, 7249 serious injuries and 19 015 minor injuries in a population of 17 million people. At this time there were 1.7 million private cars and 2.8 million motorcycles in use.

In 1983 it was estimated that the cost of a road fatality in Malaysia was 145 000 Malaysian dollars (about US$ 50 000) (1). This figure was obtained by multiplying the per capita gross national product by the mean loss of life expectancy caused by road fatalities. In 1988 the same method indicated the economic loss due to a road fatality to be approximately 184 000 Malaysian dollars. The cost ratio for slight, serious and fatal injuries sustained in road accidents was 1:10:100; the corresponding ratios for the Federal Republic of Germany in 1983 and for Hungary in 1984 were 1:22:284 and 1:7:96 respectively. The mean economic losses due to serious and slight injuries sustained on Malaysian roads in 1988 were, respectively, 18 400 and 1840 Malaysian dollars. During the same year, property damage due to road accidents amounted to 45.2 million Malaysian dollars, and the total economic loss attributable to this factor was 623.5 million Malaysian dollars. The current figure is estimated to be about 1000 million Malaysian dollars because of increases in gross national product, life expectancy, road accidents and property damage.

Death and injury rates during 1989 were calculated for travellers by air, rail and road (car and motorcycle) in the 11 peninsular states of Malaysia; Sabah and Sarawak were excluded because they have no railway services. For air and rail travel, data on passengers killed and injured and on distances travelled were obtained from the Ministry of Transport. For road travel it was assumed that the average distance travelled by motorists and motorcyclists was 20 000 kilometres. The numbers of private cars and motorcycles, and of drivers and motorcyclists killed and injured, were obtained from the Royal Malaysian Police and the Ministry of Transport. Car and pillion passengers were excluded. As

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expected, air and rail travel were much safer than travel by road, and motorcyclists had higher death and injury rates than motorists (see table).

In Malaysia, and no doubt in many other developing countries, an improved urban and interurban public transport system, with emphasis on rail, would help to reduce the frequency of death and injury on the roads; other advantages would be reductions in traffic jams, fuel consumption, and environmental pollution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fatality and injury rates for road, rail and air transport in Malaysia during 1989</th>
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<tr>
<td>Persons killed (per 10^9 km travelled)</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Road:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motorists^a</td>
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<td>Motorcyclists^b</td>
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^aExcluding passengers
^bExcluding pillion riders

Reference


A universal problem

It was long believed, and still is believed by some, that accidents occur only in developed countries, being the price that has to be paid for industrialization, technology, urbanization and motorization. This is not true. In the developing countries, accidents are perhaps just as common, and their consequences are often more serious.