

Poland : Making Roads Safer for All

KEY TOPICS: Road safety, economic growth, road maintenance and rehabilitation, National Road Safety Council, motorization in Poland, World Bank programs, EU funds, European Investment Bank



Wolomin, Poland | August 29, 2006 -- Standing at a round-about at the entrance of Wolomin, a small town 23 km east of Warsaw, it's easy to see how little things can make big differences. A typically dangerous intersection where cross-country traffic interacts with slower flows of residential cars, the spot used to generate five serious crashes a year until a concrete round-about was installed there in 2004. Since then, drivers have been forced to slow down and there have been no crashes at all.

The intersection in Wolomin was one of the top 10 "black spots" in the region and was selected for treatment as part of a multi-year campaign to improve road safety in Poland. In 2000, the per capita rate of road fatalities in Poland was roughly three times that of the United Kingdom and

the severity of road crashes measured in fatalities per 100 crashes was almost four times the EU average. Polish roads are also among the most hazardous in Europe for pedestrians.

Poland's economic growth and transition to a market economy have significantly increased the number of cars on its roads and tested the government's ability to keep up with the demand for more, better and safer roads.

The World Bank has responded to this development challenge with multiple roads projects, including a US\$29 million investment in road safety programs in 1997-2006 under the Roads II Project and the Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Project.

Lowering the cost of dangerous roads



"The economic cost of overall traffic casualties is about US\$9 billion a year (or 30 billion Polish Zloty) when you factor in medical and funeral expenses as well as lost income and GDP," says Krzysztof Jamrozik, Project Coordinator at Poland's Ministry of Transport, Secretariat of National Road Safety Council.

"Although the bulk of the cost is human grief and suffering, when a family loses its breadwinner, it is more likely to fall into poverty," he points out. "The most endangered group is young people so we are losing the most important asset of our country. This is why road safety is a development objective."

Luckily there are affordable measures to reduce this burden. With World Bank support, Poland has chosen in recent years to increase road safety awareness among drivers in graphic and simple ways.

- Big **yellow and black signs** keep a grisly count-down of road fatalities and injuries related to particular spots on national roads, urging drivers to exercise caution.
- **Roundabouts**, very rare under Communism, have become increasingly popular after their introduction in pilot areas. They are effective in improving traffic safety, take only a few months to complete on regional roads and are "likely to become a standard arrangement at intersections on rural roads and in many Polish towns," says Jamrozik. A 25-million Euro loan from the European Investment Bank will expand on the work under the Regional Road Safety Program of the Ministry of Transport initially financed by the World Bank.
- About 600 people from Poland's 16 regions went through a five-day course developed under a World Bank contract. The course was organized by the Ministry and aimed at giving officials, policemen, road engineers and rescue workers a more comprehensive view of road safety. A shorter version of the **training course** will be used to train an additional 1,500 people in 2006-2007 with support from EU funds.
- The Ministry of Transport started a series of road safety campaigns in September 2005 with a very successful **seatbelt** message targeting young Poles. It was the first time a public service announcement aimed to change people's behavior on the road in such a concerted way. An advertising clip titled "Last Bash" showed a young and carefree backseat passenger flying through a car's

Polish roads at a glance

- Motorization is increasing fast: from 9 million cars in 1990, to 14 million cars in 2003.

- Road improvement is a priority of the World Bank's [Country Assistance Strategy](#) for Poland.

- Maintenance backlog of the national road network is estimated at US\$1 billion.

- Roads projects supported by the World Bank: [Roads I](#) (1993-2000); [Roads II](#) (1997-2006); [Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation](#) (2004-2007); [Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation II](#) (2005-2007); [Roads Maintenance and Rehabilitation III](#) (2006-2011).

- Overall World Bank lending for roads in Poland: US \$886.7 million

glass windshield after failing to buckle his seat-belt.

The startling ad ran for six weeks in September and October 2005 in movie theaters, on TV, the radio and the Internet. Campaign messages were plastered on outdoor billboards, bus rears, in restaurant and disco lavatories, on screens in gas stations and even made their way into 10,000 parish churches across Poland where priests displayed campaign posters and held sermons on the protection of human lives and personal responsibility.

As a result of this publicity blitz, entirely financed by the World Bank loan, general backseat belt usage went from 38% in July 2005 to 50% in November of the same year. Seatbelt usage increased even more dramatically among young people and may have accounted for a drop in road fatalities in the months that followed the broadcasting. The Ministry of Transport, Secretariat National Road Safety Council of Poland has a five-year calendar of year-round campaigns - against speeding and drinking and driving - which it hopes to finance with World Bank and EU funds.



Changing people's behavior and saving lives

In all this work, Jamrozik was grateful for the technical development assistance that came with World Bank funding. "You can get money anywhere," he says. "But our road safety unit is small for a big country like Poland. The World Bank provided crucial consultancy that helped things happen on the ground outside the usual administrative channels, to make a difference and save people's lives."

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