



State of Israel

State Comptroller
Special Audit Report

R o a d S a f e t y



Jerusalem | May 2024



Foreword

"That innocent blood be not shed in thy land....and so blood be upon thee" (Deuteronomy 19, 10) – from this the Sages learned that the authorities are under an obligation to remove thorns from the roads and repair the streets. And if they have not done so, "Any blood that was shed there, is mentioned in the scriptures as if they spilled it" (Babylonian Talmud, Mo'ed Katan 5a).

Since the establishment of the State of Israel (1948) and until the end of 2023, 32,993 people have died in road accidents, 361 of them in 2023. The road accidents have caused hundreds of thousands of casualties. In 2022 one in every 115 Israelis was injured or killed in road accidents.

Road accidents have far reaching implications including harm to human life, bereavement, pain, and sorrow, and varying degrees of injuries. Beyond that, road accidents extract a high economic price, estimated in 2019 at approximately NIS 16 billion (four billion dollars) annually for accidents involving casualties, and also damage to additional interfaces with the economy and society.

There are three main factors contributing to road accidents: (a) The human factor – among other things human errors, negligence, failure to obey the traffic rules, failures in driver training, dangerous driving, driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. In this category, sufficient enforcement and deterrent punishment are likely to reduce the scope of the accidents; (b) The infrastructure factor – among other things defective planning, failure to deal with road accident "hot spots", narrow road shoulders, a low level of road maintenance, and a shortage of rest areas; (c) The vehicle factor – among other things "dead zones" in the vehicles, lack of technological systems for preventing accidents, and a low level of vehicle maintenance.

According to figures from the National Road Safety Authority, from 2013 to 2021 there were in Israel 4.3 fatalities for every 100,000 persons among pedestrians aged 65 and over, 1.3 times the OECD average. Among pedestrians under the age of 14, the rate of fatalities in Israel during these years was 0.6 for every 100,000 children, twice as many as the OECD countries' average. In comparison to most of the OECD countries, Israeli children are at high risk for being injured – in 2021 Israel was placed in the 28th place out of the 31 countries (among the lowest places).

The importance of the issue of road accidents and the lack of a clear trend of improvement in the past decade have led the Office of the State Comptroller to follow-up on the matter and



examine it in numerous audit reports¹. During the past two years my office has been conducting a systemic audit on the subject of road safety, examining the actions of the various bodies relevant to the subject, each in its own field, the interfaces between the bodies and the systemic treatment of road safety. This special audit report deals comprehensively with the government's actions in the subject of road safety during the course of the past decade. The audit findings and recommendations are presented in five chapters:

Chapter 1: An overview of the situation regarding road safety, information collection, and processing.

Chapter 2: Leading the fight against road accidents

Chapter 3: The human factor

Chapter 4: The infrastructure factor

Chapter 5: The vehicle factor

A central government body is required in order to deal with these factors. It should be vested with the appropriate powers and tools necessary to lead the fight against road accidents and should be responsible for determining policy and systemic action plans and should lead the planning and overall coordination between all the bodies involved in road safety. In accordance with a government decision from 2005, the National Road Safety Authority, which reports to the Minister of Transportation, was expected to meet this need.

The audit found that the National Road Safety Authority had not become a leading party in the fight against road accidents, it had little legal authority, and much of the legal authority was dispersed among the various government bodies. They acted without any systemic vision and without sufficient coordination and cooperation between them.

The audit also found defects in a variety of aspects concerning the fight against road accidents, both from the systemic aspects – a lack of a multi-year budgeted strategic plan, the failure to convene a committee of directors general in the government ministries to handle the phenomenon, and a lack of reporting to the Knesset in the matter – and in the activities of the various government bodies dealing with the matter. The audit showed that throughout the past decade, the budgets dedicated to the matter of road safety and the quantity of

1 The following may be included with the reports published by the State Comptroller: **Annual Report 71A** (2020), "Heavy Vehicles Road Safety", pp. 1041 - 1204; **Annual Report 71C** (2020), "**Aspects of Safety and Responsibility in Relation to Road Maintenance in Judea and Samaria**", pp. 270 - 314; **Report on the Audit in Local Government** (2020), "Actions for Increasing Road Safety within the Jurisdiction of the Local Authorities in the Arab Society", pp. 241 - 323; **Annual Report 68C** (2018), "Regulation of Electric Bicycles and Two-Wheeled Vehicles Use in the Urban Space", pp. 75-145; Annual Report 67A (2016), "The Fight Against Road Accidents and the Functioning of the National Road Safety Authority", pp. 671 - 722; **Collection of Audit Reports for 2011** (2011), "The National Road Safety Authority – Functioning and Administrative Procedures", pp. 179 - 209.



manpower dealing with the matter had gradually decreased in each of the bodies dealing with the matter: In 2021, the flexible budget utilized by the National Road Safety Authority for its activities was only NIS 40 million, compared with NIS 125 million in 2008, when it was established. From 2022 to 2023, approximately 13% of the total approved job positions in the Police Traffic Department (137 positions) had not actually been filled, and neither had approximately 20% of the total traffic police job positions in the districts (201 positions). Furthermore, there are many gaps, among other things in the educational programs in kindergartens and schools, driver training programs, ascertaining drivers' medical capacity, enforcement and explanatory activities, overload on the traffic courts, safety infrastructures on the intercity highways and in localities, and activities for ensuring that the vehicles travelling on the roads are roadworthy. Especially large gaps were found in the Arab society.

The issue of road accidents has been on the public agenda for many years, and the Israeli governments have made many decisions over the years in the fight against traffic accidents. Nevertheless, the data indicates that the various activities adopted by the governments during the past decade have not been successful in reducing the number of fatalities and casualties in road accidents. This is contrary to the trends in many countries in Europe during the same period. These countries were unwilling to come to terms with the loss involved in road accidents, with the accompanying suffering, bereavement, and economic costs. Consequently, they set a goal of "zero fatalities in road accidents".

The struggle against road accidents is on-going and requires investing significant resources and efforts. The necessary actions include increased education and training, information campaigns, legal enforcement, judicial and punitive measures, combined with activities to improve the traffic infrastructure and vehicle safety. These steps are likely to reduce the number of casualties in accidents.

Since the human factor is responsible for the majority of road accidents, great efforts must be made to deal with this factor, combined with actions to improve the infrastructure and improve vehicle safety. All government bodies in charge of the matter of road safety, including the Ministry of Transport, the National Road Safety Authority, the Israel Police, the court system, and the Ministry of Education, must rectify the defects described in this report.

There is no doubt that the success of this vital undertaking begins with the personal responsibility of all the road users. It requires a lead agency possessing appropriate authority, and setting an amply funded strategic plan that contains clear and measurable goals. In addition, all the relevant bodies must act independently in their fields and coordinate their joint activities. Above all – the commitment of the Prime Minister and all the government ministers to this task is paramount. The experience of many European countries, that have succeeded in reducing the numbers of casualties in road accidents, teaches us that this is not decreed by fate, but it is a fight that we can win and save human lives. The Minister of Transport must give top priority to the matter and rectify all the defects that arose in the report. An informed proceeding and the learning of lessons from the method of dealing with the matter in recent years are likely to help in reducing the number of fatalities and casualties



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and the bereavement, sorrow, and pain that accompany them, and reduce the financial and social damages to the economy.

Road accidents are one of the main causes of death in the State of Israel, and this being the case, the fight against them is a national mission. Ensuring the welfare of the road users is the State's duty towards its citizens, and it is based upon a moral and ethical imperative, as well as on social and economic necessity.

The preparation of this report necessitated great effort by the staff of the Economics and National Infrastructures Audit Division and the staff of the Headquarters Department at the Office of the State Comptroller, who toiled on the preparation of the report with the greatest professionalism, thoroughness, fairness, and attention to detail. My thanks go to them.

We shall continue to pray and wish for the success of the IDF and the security forces in this difficult war that has been forced upon us by our most bitter enemies who wish to wipe us out as a nation and as a state, for the return of the hostages to their homes and for quiet and peaceful days.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Matanyahu Englman".

Matanyahu Englman
State Comptroller and
Ombudsman of Israel

Jerusalem, May 2024