



Exploratory Document on the Establishment of a European Road Safety Agency (ERSA)



ECF gratefully acknowledges financial support from the LIFE Programme of the European Union



ECF gratefully acknowledges financial support from the cycling industry via Cycling Industries Europe

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Publishing credits

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Executive Summary

In 2021, the European Parliament called for the establishment of a European transport agency dedicated to road safety:

“Drawing inspiration from the contribution to advances in safety that Europeans agencies in other modes of transport have delivered, the Report calls the Commission to further support safe road transport by exploring the feasibility of creating a new agency.”¹

The European Commission has therefore been tasked with exploring the possibility of setting up a Road Safety Agency.

According to a European Court of Auditors report on EU Road safety:

“...the Commission is assessing whether to set up an EU agency with responsibility for road safety, among other things, to promote new initiatives and improve coordination”²

The purpose of this report is to explore how the establishment of a European Road Safety Agency (ERSA) could address weaknesses in EU road safety governance, and a persistent plateau of road fatalities. It attempts to provide ideas as to how an agency could support the EU institutions, Member States, and orbiting agencies and departments, specifically in areas where there have been perceived deficiencies.

After significant progress in reducing road fatalities in the early 2000s, the decline in EU road fatalities has largely plateaued in recent years, with a reported 20,380 lives lost in 2023, a mere 1.3% decrease from 2022's 20,652 fatalities.³ While the total number of deaths in 2023 was 10% lower than in 2019 (pre-Covid pandemic), the pace of reduction remains too slow to meet the EU's ambitious target of halving road deaths by 2030⁴, showing only a 16% fall between 2013 and 2023.⁵ While road fatalities have generally decreased, albeit at a slow rate, cycling fatalities across the EU have shown a worrying trend of stagnation. The fatality rate for cyclists has plateaued and, in some areas, even increased. There were 1,918 cyclist fatalities in 2013 and 1,948 in 2023.

Road transport is responsible for around 97% of all transport related fatalities.⁶ However, unlike aviation, maritime, and rail, it does not have a dedicated agency overseeing its safety. An ERSA could provide technical expertise, improve data collection and analysis, and develop better coordination across EU institutions and Member States in what is a fragmented constellation of institutions, Directorates-General (DGs), agencies, and government bodies.

Lessons can also be drawn from the other transport mode agencies such as, EASA EMSA, ERA. An ERSA could close governance gaps, enhance safety for all road users, and align road safety policy with sustainability and health goals.

¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0211_EN.html

² https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2024-04/SR-2024-04_EN.pdf

³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Road_safety_statistics_in_the_EU

⁴ As outlined in the EU Road Safety Policy Framework 2021–2030 – Next steps towards 'Vision Zero' <https://transport.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-10/SWD2190283.pdf>

⁵ https://www.eaprso.org/media/t5zetfr4/ersonext_annualreport_20250227.pdf

⁶ https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2003_transport_safety_stats_eu_overview.pdf

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1. EU level support

Data Collection and Analysis

A crucial element of road safety policy is data. Other transport modes' agencies (EASA, EMSA, ERA)⁷ gather, provide and use good quality data to improved transport services and safety. All three have centralised reporting and crash/accident monitoring with annual and thematic reports. Road transport, despite being more complex, with more complex data reporting and collection does not have any EU agency to coordinate road safety data across the EU.

Road transport does have the CARE/ERSO reporting database and analysis.⁸ The CARE database receives data from each EU Member State which in turn collects accident data usually through their national road traffic police, gathered after police investigations of road traffic crashes involving fatalities or injuries. The European Road Safety Observatory (ERSO) examines and publishes thematic and annual reports on the CARE, and other, data.

However, we do perceive some problems with the current CARE database collection:

- The CARE is a fragmented system that relies mainly on police reported crashes and is often collected and categorised in different ways. The collection of data can vary between Member States. For example, serious injuries can be defined differently, despite MAIS3+⁹ being the official EU standard; Multi-vehicle crashes are defined differently; bicycles are classified as micromobility; some collect e-scooter/micromobility data, some do not; infrastructure categorisation can be incorrect, or variously interpreted; there is a lack of correlation with hospital or other data.
- There is often under-reporting of injury data around the EU¹⁰. This is true of all modes, but this is often vastly exaggerated for cycling, walking, and micromobility crashes.¹¹
 - A Dutch study found that only about 12% of seriously injured pedestrians and cyclists where no motor vehicle was involved had a police record, compared to around 65% for those involved with a motor vehicle, and that around 15% of all road deaths in 2016 were not recorded by the police.¹²
 - A study in the UK found that only 9% of e-scooter casualties presenting to emergency departments were recorded in the official data.¹³
 - Comparison of police and hospital data in Greece over the period 1985-2015 revealed that the number of road deaths recorded by hospitals is 15% to 25% higher than the number of road deaths recorded by the police.¹⁴

⁷European Aviation Safety Agency <https://www.easa.europa.eu/en> European Maritime Safety Agency <https://www.emsa.europa.eu/> European Union Agency for railways <https://www.era.europa.eu/>

⁸ https://road-safety.transport.ec.europa.eu/european-road-safety-observatory_en

⁹ MAIS3+ refers to the Maximum Abbreviated Injury Scale score of 3 or higher, meaning a person has sustained at least one serious (AIS 3), severe, critical, or maximal injury. It's a key metric for defining severe road traffic injuries in medical contexts, in Europe, based on the highest injury severity recorded across all body regions. https://road-safety.transport.ec.europa.eu/european-road-safety-observatory/data-and-analysis/serious-injuries_en

¹⁰ https://road-safety.transport.ec.europa.eu/european-road-safety-observatory/statistics-and-analysis-archive/pedestrians/data-considerations_en

¹¹ <https://etsc.eu/serious-road-injuries-massively-underreported/>

¹² <https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/PIN-FLASH-35-final.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.pacts.org.uk/comparing-police-and-hospital-e-scooter-casualty-datasets/>

¹⁴ <https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/PIN-FLASH-35-final.pdf>

- ETSC also claim that there is evidence across the EU of underreporting of alcohol, drug and mobile phone use crash incidences¹⁵, and there do not seem to be any standardised way of defining an alcohol transport related death.
- There are no exposure data for cyclists, pedestrian, micromobility, therefore there is little understanding of risk.¹⁶ Country, infrastructure, or environmental factors cannot be truly understood without the context of exposure to the risk.
- ETSC claim that around half of the EU Member States use complementary data sources to enrich police data; half do not¹⁷.
- The ERSO website is very fragmented, with dead links, reports randomly scattered around the website without any real clear presentation of the data and work into the reports or data collection.
- There are data from the database which is not public, with only the data found in its annual and thematic reports being available for statistical analysis.
- Data tends to lag, with data and reports available only after two or more years, thereby important safety trends are missed or slow to be assessed and tackled.
- Data from cities can be available, and many cities do provide data, but it is not systematically collected or used at the European level to understand trends in, for example, cycling and walking, safety.
- There is no coordination of a European in-depth accident investigation data collection¹⁸.

An ERSA could coordinate and improve the collection of road safety data, clearing up many of these issues. An ERSA could also improve, build on, but also go much further than the CARE database currently does. For example, it could:

- Assist Member States by providing a standardised way of using complementary data sources for serious and fatal crashes, assisting in anonymising data if required.
- Make sure that the collected data is open to the public and improve it with geolocated road safety data.
- Incorporate the Sustainable Urban Mobility Indicators (SUMIs),¹⁹ or at the least use this as a tool to standardise data collection across all EU urban areas or even expand to smaller communities and rural regions.
- Incorporate traffic management data from road operators or authorities.
- Incorporate AI into safety prediction and management. The rail industry uses AI to predict safety issues along the network. Despite the obvious differences, and complexities, this could be a useful template to model.
- Build on the work undertaken in the EU DaCoTA project which built a network of 22 in-depth accident investigation teams in 19 countries and piloted an accident investigation data collection system. This would seem to be an opportunity at EU level to drive forward a harmonised and systematic pan-European accident investigation
- Drive the development and implementation of advanced collection technologies. CARE relies mainly on police-reported accident data, but an ERSA could advocate for and facilitate the integration of data from new sources. This includes leveraging anonymised data from

¹⁵ <https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/PIN-FLASH-35-final.pdf>

¹⁶ Exposure data, such as distance or time travelled by different modes of transport, is important as it allows for the calculation of risk rates (e.g., fatalities per kilometre travelled), this provides a true measure of safety rather than just absolute numbers. Otherwise, increases or decreases in injury figures could simply reflect changes in numbers of people using that mode rather than genuine improvement or deterioration in road safety.

¹⁷ <https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/PIN-FLASH-35-final.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/PIN-FLASH-35-final.pdf>

¹⁹ https://urban-mobility-observatory.transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/new-urban-mobility-indicator-fiches-released-support-sump-implementation-2024-07-23_en

connected vehicles (Event Data Recorders - EDRs),²⁰ in-vehicle safety systems, telematics, bike and e-scooter sharing, smart phone transport data usage, and healthcare systems to gain a more comprehensive understanding of accident causation and injury severity.

- Partner with the Data for Road Safety (DFRS)²¹ to integrate real-time road hazard data into CARE or similar database.

The CARE database would require many improvements to make it truly accessible; it is currently more of a repository than an active monitoring system, with many inconsistencies, and lacking the resources to do detailed analyses into issues and trends across the EU. An ERSA could look at more interesting ways to improve and take inspiration from the other transport agencies. It could also ensure that a standardised data collection with a uniform and consistent reporting and high data quality across the EU.

Through its website, the ERSA could also visualise real time crash data along with safety alerts running alongside interactive maps of high roads, cycling, and walking infrastructure. Eventually a safety agency could move towards transforming the CARE model into a dynamic, predictive and living database, enabling proactive safety interventions rather than reactive ones, by establishing common protocols for collecting and integrating real-time data. Likewise, other mode transport agencies such as EASA's ECCAIRS²² and EMSA's EMCIP²³ have interesting safety reporting strategies that could be reviewed for road use. Of course, the European road network is more complex and larger in scale, but these strategies could be repurposed for use in the road sector

With regards to the European Road Safety Observatory (ERSO), despite the interesting thematic and national reports, is not an institution with the authority of an EU level agency, nor does it have its resources; it is a more passive, technical data review platform. ERSO is not able to act on the data that it examines; it is able to inform but cannot issue real guidance, enforce data standards, or evaluate and monitor Member State performance. ERSO provides a useful technical foundation for the collation, examination, and use of the data collected from the EU Member States, but it does not enforce, or act, nor does it have the resources to provide leadership on the examination and use of data on road safety.

Technical and Regulatory Support

An issue in current EU road safety governance is the lack of a dedicated source of technical expertise directly available to the EU institutions. An ERSA could significantly benefit all institutions by providing crucial, evidence-based specialised knowledge on road safety for better policy and political decision making.

Other transport agencies provide high-level, continuous, and independent technical input. However, road transport lacks a central technical authority. This gap in technical expertise can have consequences for the quality, consistency, and, ultimately, ambition of EU safety policy.

The legislative files undertaken by Commission DGs, Parliament committees, and Member States are often very complex, especially concerning vehicle regulations and automated driving systems. An agency staffed with technical, legal, vehicle and road safety expertise could assist MEPs and Commission staff so that policy is always rooted in sound scientific evidence. This would also assist

²⁰ An Event Data Recorder (EDR), often referred to as a "black box" in vehicles, records technical vehicle data for a short period before, during, and after a collision. This data includes speed, braking, etc. and is important for reconstructing crashes and understanding causes

²¹ <https://www.dataforroadsafety.eu/>

²² <https://aviationreporting.eu/en>

²³ <https://www.emsa.europa.eu/emcip.html>

implementing legislation with complex work in UNECE²⁴ bodies such as WP29²⁵, as well as provide legislative interpretation, guidelines or recommendations. This would also alleviate some of the strain on resources of institution officials working on these technical files.

The main employment model for the EU Commission is based on the “generalist” recruitment model and is an important part of the EU architecture. Technical staff can be recruited, but most policy officers and staff are not “experts” in their field of policy. Of course, this has its benefits to maintain a “neutral” and non-political staff, and staff are recruited for their administrative, coordination and executive abilities. However, it does also mean that recruitment does not necessarily focus on the technical knowledge of the subject that staff will be working on.

This lack of deep technical understanding can mean reliance on Member State expertise, which may also be liable to lobby and influence²⁶, or hiring external consultant technical expertise which can be slow, expensive and cumbersome, when sometimes quick reaction and input is required, and seconding staff from other organisations or Member States could again lead to accusations of undue influence/lobby.

An ERSA would be an ideal accompaniment to the generalist Commission model; staff would be specifically recruited for their knowledge in the field of road safety. Of course, they would be subject to lobby and influence from external sources, but this influence would always be seen through the lens of the ERSA staff's technical knowledge and filtered through the Commission staff's executive role in meeting advocates and lobbyists. Input from external sources would still be useful and important but would always be analysed and within an expert's purview. Commission staff that may be open to more extensive influence, being in the coordination role, would also have expertise in the agency to fall on to fact check.

Fragmented and complex internal structure

The various and numerous Directorates-General can also make coordination difficult, and differences of internal opinion can stress the collegiality principle of the Commission. Coordination across DGs such as inter-service consultations, perhaps the closest that European road safety policy gets to detailed coordination, are often involved in the latter stages of policy development, less so if at all in the drafting process, and critical safety concerns can oftentimes be subordinated to other market or industrial priorities. DG MOVE in principle leads on active mobility and urban transport but lacks control over vehicle regulations that critically impact cyclist and pedestrian safety. There is no coordinated effort amongst EU departments to ensure funding or standardising safe infrastructure or to provide high-quality exposure and other data. No single DG or agency has the mandate to integrate active mobility considerations and promotion across all EU road safety legislation.

The following non-exhaustive list underlines the complex structure that can make it difficult to provide road safety policies that also takes into account the various, and often competing, interests of the European Commission Directorates-General.

²⁴ The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations. It works to facilitate cooperation among its 56 member states on issues including transport, environment, trade, and statistics, providing the framework for global industrial standards and regulation.

²⁵ Working Party 29 develops and updates international UN Regulations, Global Technical Regulations, and UN Rules on such as vehicle safety and environmental performance,

²⁶ Especially considering their role also as legislators

- DG MOVE:

DG MOVE deals with overall transport policy, publishing framework and objectives and providing road safety targets. It is also responsible for many safety related legislative initiatives such as the Driving Licence Directive,²⁷ the Road Infrastructure Safety Management Directive,²⁸ TEN-T regulation,²⁹ and the collection of transport data. DG MOVE also deals with some enforcement issues such as the Cross Border Enforcement directive³⁰ and the Union-Wide Effect of Certain Driving Disqualifications.³¹ Though DG MOVE is the main DG concerned with road safety, it often only plays an advisory role in some of the major flagship EU road safety policies and legislation such as the General Safety Regulations (GSR) for example.

- DG GROW:

Since DG GROW deals with the EU single market it is mainly responsible for vehicle type approval, including safety and environmental performance under the General Safety Regulation, Autonomous Vehicle regulation, L-category vehicle regulations, and other vehicle standardisation. DG GROW also deals with the legislation such as the machinery directive that EPAC standards³² are harmonised with.

Though DG GROW oversees the safety of vehicles, its core mandate is economic competitiveness and the single market. This could create conflicts of interest and limit the incorporation of broader safety, sustainability, and other road user safety concerns

- DG RTD:

DG RTD is responsible for EU policy on research, science and innovation. It aims to develop evidence-based insights for safety regulation and enforcement, including piloting transport and vehicle safety technologies. DG RTD has supported and helped fund the activities of the Connected, Cooperative and Automated Mobility (CCAM) partnership, and many other safety related projects such as V4SAFETY, SafetyCube, SaferAfrica, SHOW, and InDev.

RTD is supposed to act as a bridge between policy and research. However, we often perceive a lack of clear coordination with road safety trends and are often not tied to the timetable or content of policy developments (see section on research).

- DG JUST:

DG JUST is responsible for the Victims' Rights Directive, which includes victims of road traffic offences. While DG MOVE has overall responsibility for the Cross-Border Enforcement Directive and the Union-Wide Effect of Certain Driving Disqualifications directive, the actual cooperation and enforcement relies often on judicial and administrative cooperation, areas within DG JUST's mandate. With serious road crimes, the tools and legislation, that underpins the European arrest warrant, would also come under the remit of DG JUST. Funding for road victims' organisations are also a part of DG

²⁷ Driving Licence Directive 2006/126/EC establishes common rules on the issuance, renewal, and mutual recognition of driving licences across the EU to improve road safety and facilitate free movement. review under way [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2023/0053\(COD\)](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2023/0053(COD))

²⁸ Directive 2008/96/EC (as amended by Directive 2019/1936) sets minimum safety requirements for the management of road infrastructure on the TEN-T network, including audits, inspections, and including coordinating Network-wide Road Safety Assessment

²⁹ Regulation (EU) 2024/1679 establishes updated guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), replacing Regulation (EU) 1315/2013, and introduces new provisions for infrastructure standards, project prioritisation, and the designation of European Transport Corridors.

³⁰ Directive (EU) 2024/3237 amends Directive 2015/413 to enhance the cross-border exchange of information on road-safety-related traffic offences, expanding the scope of offences, clarifying procedures for data access, and strengthening mutual assistance between Member States

³¹ Ongoing procedure seeking to ensure that serious driving disqualifications (e.g., for drink-driving or fatal crashes) imposed in one Member State are recognised and enforced throughout the EU

³² Electrically Power Assisted Cycle, otherwise known as an e-bike or pedelec

JUST work on road safety.³³ DG JUST also works with OLAF, the European Anti-Fraud Office, on cross border importation of illegal vehicles. OLAF itself is technically a Directorate-General of the European Commission.³⁴

- DG HOME:

DG HOME also deals with cross-border enforcement, supporting information-sharing on criminal driving offences. It also manages the Schengen Information System (SIS) used to track individuals wanted for serious traffic crimes. DG HOME also works closely with, and coordinates some of the work of EUROPOL which deals with traffic crimes. DG HOME is responsible for external border security, and some customs procedures, which plays an important role in filtering out illegal vehicles into the EU. An example would be in dealing with the problematic import of illegal or tampered so-called “Fatbikes” in many EU countries.³⁵

- DG CLIMA and DG ENV:

DGs CLIMA and ENV do not play a direct role in road safety but are involved in an important supporting role of shaping transport policy at the EU level, their interest lies mainly in the environmental impact of transport and sustainability. Promoting modal shift from motorised vehicles to cycling, walking and public transport is not only an environmental goal but also has positive safety repercussions. 99% of pedestrian fatalities and 83% of cycling fatalities occur in crashes with motorised vehicles.³⁶ DG ENV and CLIMA environmental modal shift policies are also road safety policies. It is important that road safety policy making incorporates sustainability and environmental considerations, in particular when promoting cycling and walking. Cycling and walking promotion and safety are very much interlinked. DG CLIMA’s mission on climate friendly cities³⁷ for compact urban design, low-emission zones, car-free zones, and active mobility infrastructure, very much links to DG MOVE’s mission for the Urban Mobility Framework and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, all of which have important safety elements. Similarly, air and noise pollution reduction have links to the promotion of cycling, walking, and the reduction of motor vehicle traffic all with positive road safety consequences.

- DG TAXUD:

DG TAXUD coordinates the harmonisation of vehicle taxation across the EU Member States. These tax rules could have important road safety implications, for example by discouraging the purchase of large SUVs and pick-up trucks. These pose greater risk to cyclists and pedestrians due to higher mass, visibility issues, and more severe crash profiles. Promoting the use of smaller, lighter vehicle, with positive safety benefits for all road users. DG TAXUD also manages EU-wide rules on VAT exemptions and rates, which influence the affordability of safer and more sustainable transport modes. Again this is important for the illegal and tampered bikes such as “Fatbikes”, the import of these bikes is causing road safety issues in many EU member States, it is TAXUD’s remit to deal with the import of dangerous vehicles, often in collaboration with DG Home. The EU VAT rates directive, also under TAXUD allows Member States to reduce VAT for the purchase of sustainable (and safer) modes of transport such as bicycles and EPACs.³⁸

³³ <https://www.lobbyfacts.eu/datacard/victim-support-europe?rid=83945428894-94&sid=172445#data-card-data-financial>

³⁴ https://anti-fraud.ec.europa.eu/index_en

³⁵ <https://leva-eu.com/authorities-seized-10500-illegal-fat-bikes-in-the-netherlands-last-year/>

³⁶ <https://etsc.eu/urgent-action-needed-to-tackle-deaths-of-pedestrians-and-cyclists/>

³⁷ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/climate-neutral-and-smart-cities_en

³⁸ <https://www.ecf.com/en/news/cycling-organisations-achieve-important-victory-for-eu-consumers-reduced-vat-soon-possible-for-bicycles-and-e-bikes/>

- DG FISMA:

Deals with insurance-related issues across the EU, including the Motor Insurance Directive³⁹ that deals with the aftermath of crashes, responsibilities and scope of legislation.

There are of course also the corresponding multiple committees in the Parliament that are responsible for various files, often with different committees providing input and amended text on the same file.

Then there are ten organisations and bodies that are linked to, or run by the European Commission, that have a link to road safety:

- EGRIS Expert Group on Road Infrastructure Safety
- Expert Group on Road Transport (including road safety)
- Expert Group on Urban Mobility
- European Road Safety Observatory (ERSO) Management Group – overseeing ERSO and CARE
- High-Level Group on Road Safety – composed of Member States representatives
- CCAM (Connected, Cooperative & Automated Mobility) Platform
- European Road Safety Charter
- GEAR 2030 (High-Level Group on Automotive Industry)
- ERTRAC (European Road Transport Research Advisory Council)
- EC Joint Research Centre (JRC)
- Motor Vehicle Working Group (MVWG)
- Motorcycle Working Group (MCWG)

In conclusion, an ERSA could help to address the problem of this fragmented governance and implementation across Commission departments, expert groups and organisations, by providing a central and independent body with an explicit mandate to help coordinate road safety policy at EU level. ERSA could act as an integrating institutional focal point, managing a shared road safety agenda across these departments and agencies/organisations ensuring that safety objectives are firmly embedded in EU policy, legislation, funding programmes, and research. It could complement the Commission's inter-service on road safety, provide technical advice, and provide a neutral forum for the resolution of inter-DG tensions.

Uniform Interpretation and Implementation

Providing guidance on interpreting and implementing EU legislation could be a useful role for an ERSA. . There is a strong precedent for this kind of role in other EU regulatory domains, the maritime EMSA, rail (ERA) and Aviation EASA both provide this type of service, as do non-transport agencies such as, the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), and the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

This work is mainly non-binding guidance on applying safety rules or assisting on application of harmonised standards, so to be clear, these agencies do not change the law but are able to shape how it is understood and applied.

³⁹ The Motor Insurance Directive (Directive 2009/103/EC) establishes the legal framework ensuring that all motor vehicles in the EU are covered by third-party liability insurance and that victims of road traffic accidents receive compensation regardless of where in the EU the crash occurs

External Coordination

There is a plethora of organisations external to the EU or national governance that could be reached out to by an ERSA for collaboration, cooperation or support.

The important work of Euro NCAP could have a complementary involvement with an ERSA, leveraging its expertise in vehicle safety assessment to inform and support the agency's objectives. It has higher performance requirements in crash test and technology assessments than the European legislation, leveraging its input could also incentivise higher regulatory safety requirements. There are other vehicle ratings system in European countries, for example Folksam⁴⁰ in Sweden, and there is also work being done in many universities and research institutes around Europe. There is also the work of testing, certification and inspection organisations operating around Europe, such as the TUV group.

To take Euro NCAP as an example, an ERSA could integrate Euro NCAP's technical expertise and data into the process of developing and updating EU vehicle safety legislation and implementing UNECE regulations. Euro NCAP also has an "Advanced" reward system for the best new safety technologies intended to incentivise manufacturers to implement innovations before they become mandatory. An ERSA could work with Euro NCAP to identify the most promising new technologies, assess their benefits, and even potentially fast-track them into possible future EU regulations.

Research

An ERSA could help coordinate the link between research and policy which can be problematic at European level. European funded projects often lack clear coordination with road safety trends and are not tied to policy developments.

As an example, the Horizon Europe call titled HORIZON-CL5-2026-01-D6-13⁴¹ dealing with the safety of cyclists, pedestrians, and micromobility riders, while with excellent intentions, asks potential project consortia, amongst other things, to,

“Identify best practices in the design of bicycles and micromobility vehicles in terms of stability and the avoidance of single crashes, contributing to the underlying development of a draft European regulatory framework on the type-approval of micromobility vehicles or self-certification based on harmonised standards”

Meanwhile the European Commission has vowed to publish a proposal on a Personal Mobility Device framework⁴² that would seek to describe and define the standardisation requirements of these vehicles. However, the Horizon project would start half way through 2026⁴³, realistically with results by 2028-2029 and nearing the end of the current Commission term with limited availability to provide input into the proposal drafting work. In other words, the policy will more than likely come before the research, rather than the research informing the policy. This illustrates the lack of coordination amongst DGs, and between policy and research.

Likewise, the call also requires consortia to “...quantify the impact of the geometric design, quality, and continuity of the cycling infrastructure on the safety of cyclists, pedestrians and micromobility users,

⁴⁰ <https://www.folksam.se/>

⁴¹ https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/id/HORIZON_HORIZON-CL5-2026-01-D6-13

⁴² Work with consultants has already started <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b042f558-a319-11eb-9585-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> and <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4286a092-a55f-11ef-85f0-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> as has consultations with stakeholders

⁴³ Call proposal deadline is Jan 2026

considering their increasing demand, operating speeds, and size of vehicles”. However, The European Commission EGRIS working group is currently developing best practices to improve infrastructure safety for cyclists, pedestrians, and users as part of the implementation of the Road Infrastructure Safety Management. Again, useful research from the Horizon call will be too late for input to the guidelines of this group.

2. Member State Support

Capacity building and best practice

There could be many opportunities for providing capacity building for Member States, including:

- Running training and/or certification programs such as EU-wide certification for road safety auditors and traffic engineers or develop training modules for public authorities on Safe System principles, cycling infrastructure design, and speed management. The EASA does exactly these types of trainings for aviation at the member state level and it could be a useful model for an ERSA.
- Modelled on the maritime EMSA, an ERSA could identify high-fatality corridors across the EU, particularly useful for rural cyclist crashes, knowledge of which is currently severely lacking.
- Identify systematic/recurring issues on the TEN-T road network, that will allow for evidence based adjustments in the TEN-T policy
- Assisting Member States upgrade national crash databases to align with CARE/ERSO standards and provide exposure data tools to include walking, cycling, and micromobility users.
- Providing useful input and assistance to local authorities or organisations in applying for EU funded projects such as for Horizon Europe
- Support national market surveillance against illegal vehicle modifications (e.g. tampered and illegally imported EPACs).
- Host an online platform with an inventory of successful road safety policy
- Host partnership of cities on the model of ETSC’s EU Road Safety Exchange⁴⁴

An ERSA could also assist in helping to resolve some of the EU’s other systemic problems such as fragmented, inconsistent, or incorrectly applied road safety law across the EU Member States, or assist in adherence to UNECE requirements

Communications and Public Engagement

An EU Road Safety Agency (ERSA) could not only improve policy coordination but also greatly improve how road safety messages and policies are communicated to the public, stakeholders, and other policymakers.

Publish crash investigation results

The US NTSB makes public all crash and accident investigations on its website.⁴⁵ There is not one EU Member State that publishes its crash investigations. Sweden’s Trafikverket, the Netherlands SWOV

⁴⁴ <https://etsc.eu/projects/eu-road-safety-exchange/>

⁴⁵ <https://carol.nts.gov/>

and Germany's GIDAS conduct analysis of some sample cases, but there is no national database of crash reporting.

Pro-active public engagement

There is no real structured public voice or feedback channel for road safety concerns at EU level. The EU with its complex directives and regulations always feel one or two steps removed from the public. Of course, on most issues it is, sitting above local and national government and with subsidiarity being an essential part of the EU legal framework, it can feel as though it is very separate from European citizens' everyday lives. However, road safety can be a very personal, visceral subject. We all experience varying levels of safety on the road, and with 20,000 victims many people know someone that has been killed or seriously injured on the roads. European engagement should be a more important part of European road safety strategy.

Social media and awareness campaigns could be another component of the agency's work. Most campaigns are nationally run, but there have been, and will be in the future, important rule changes at the European level that impact all EU citizens. For example, the update to the General Safety Regulations. Most people have no idea about the new technologies that are legally mandated in their car. If people do not have knowledge of Intelligent Speed Assistance and its benefits, then drivers will not use it, and turn it off. Or the Driving licence Directive with important updates to how member states will run licencing, training, and testing regimes.

3. EU Road Safety Progress Audit

A 2024 EU Road Safety Progress Audit by the European Court of Auditors set out to assess whether the European Commission had been effective in achieving the EU road safety objectives. Here are some of the main EU deficiencies identified in the report and brief suggestions how an ERSA could assist:

- Fragmented governance across Commission departments - ERSA could serve as a central coordinating body, making road safety integrated across different relevant sectors such as climate, urban, health, and transport policy.
- Lack of EU oversight of national road safety strategies - ERSA could assess and benchmark national plans against EU targets, identifying gaps and supporting convergence.
- Incomparable serious injury data across Member States - ERSA could promote the use of the standard EU definition (MAIS 3+), assist in integration of police and hospital data, and ensure consistent reporting.
- Low EU monitoring of enforcement (e.g. speeding, drink-driving) - ERSA could collect data on enforcement, support harmonisation of enforcement practices, and capacity build across EU Member States.
- EU infrastructure legislation excludes high-risk roads (such as urban/cycling infrastructure, rural roads) - ERSA could develop safety guidelines for all road types beyond TEN-T and promote their uptake amongst Member States.
- Road safety not prioritised in EU project selection - ERSA could propose safety impact assessments required for EU-funded projects
- Limited use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) - ERSA could improve KPI to properly include cyclists and pedestrians and harmonise KPI collection.
- Not confronting new challenges and emerging issues - ERSA could provide attempt to anticipate upcoming issues and provide regulatory advice on new mobility modes such as e-scooters, and assist in AV/ADAS regulations.

4. How could an ERSA be legally defined and funded?

Legal basis

A European Road Transport Safety Agency (ERSA) would have to be defined in EU law through a dedicated “Founding Regulation”, through the ordinary co-decision legislative procedure. It could follow the legal model of the other EU transport agencies. Below is a concise outline of how ERSA could be legally created and structured under EU law.

ERSA would be established via a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council, based on, Article 91 TFEU⁴⁶ –of the common transport policy, and Article 114 TFEU (for single market, environmental and consumer protection, and internal market)

This regulation would define ERSA’s legal mandate, governance, and funding. It would grant the agency the limits of its authority to act within the scope of EU law, while ensuring that it supports the European Commission without replacing its core competences, and respecting Member States subsidiarity. It would essentially be the same process used to create EASA, EMA, EFSA, and other EU independent agencies.

An ERSA core functions could be defined as:

- Data governance: Harmonise serious injury data, coordinate exposure data, maintain a CARE database with view to improving real time application
- Technical guidance: Provide assistance in (non-binding) interpretation of EU road safety law
- Crash investigations: Coordinate in-depth or systemic crash reviews (but not legally binding in judicial cases)
- Monitoring: Evaluate the EU Member States' safety performance, strategies, and KPI reporting
- Policy support: To advise the Commission, Parliament and Member States on legislative proposals and impact assessments
- Coordination; Coordinate cross-Directorate road safety efforts by facilitating structured cooperation, information exchange, and strategic alignment between relevant Commission services
- Capacity-building: Offer training, toolkits, guidance and expert support to national and local authorities, and provide partnership cooperation between them
- Communication: Engage the public, victims, and stakeholders with transparent safety reporting

In terms of oversight the ERSA would be subject to audits by the European Court of Auditors, required to publish annual work programmes, activity reports, and finances.

Subsidiarity – EU competence of an ERSA

For an agency to justify its status as an EU body, it is important that it has a strong cross-border dimension and to also satisfy the principle of subsidiarity. This document has focused on that European aspect. Below is a brief conclusion on the relevance of subsidiarity and the justification for the agency’s cross-border nature:

⁴⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12016ME%2FTXT>

- Cross-Border Road Transport and the Single Market – cross border movement of traffic is significant. Different road rules, enforcement, and infrastructure standards across Member States create inconsistency, undermining safety. An ERSA would then support the free movement of goods and people.
- There is great inconsistency and uneven performance across Member States, capacity building, data sharing, and investment strategies can be leveraged from leading countries to climber countries.
- Harmonisation of data and collection of data. Definitions, collection, and use of data vary widely across countries, making EU-wide comparisons unreliable. This lack of comparable data and collection undermines the EU's ability to progress towards the shared EU 2030 goal of halving road fatalities targets and 2050 Vision Zero objective.⁴⁷
- Coordinated safety standards for cross-border infrastructure, such as the Ten-T network and its urban nodes that are now also an important element of cross border road safety.
- Type-approval and vehicle safety across borders – Ensuring the free movement of safe goods is an essential EU competence, and as part of that single market, vehicle safety is a main pillar of road safety.
- Emerging mobility risks require joined up, supranational regulation. Micromobility vehicle standards and regulations, Automated Vehicles, digital mobility, bicycle complexity, aging populations all require a cross border approach to coordinate guidance and facilitate Member State cooperation on monitoring and possibly regulating these new risks.
- Capacity building – An ERSA could provide technical assistance, training, and harmonised toolkits, with countries that lead in certain areas of safety providing guidance for others.
- An ERSA can provide input to EU candidate countries for satisfying the EU membership “Copenhagen Criteria”⁴⁸. This requires candidate countries to implement all EU road safety legislation, as well as aligning road safety targets with that of that of the EU.
- The EU has joint targets (e.g. halving deaths and serious injuries by 2030), yet there is no central authority to ensure a collective responsibility and delivery of those targets.

Funding

Main funding would mainly come from the EU general budget, but with opportunities to receive funding through Horizon or CEF research for certain technical activities. The cross-border, cross-agency, and cross-institutional coordination requirements can justify funding from the general budget.

However, the negative cost externalities of road transport across the EU stand at around €800 billion, of which around €282 billion come from road crashes. Internalising this cost is estimated at under half, even with insurance. Internalising the external costs is limited and is less than half, even when accounting for insurance.⁴⁹ Public funding for a Road Safety Agency, would be a crude tool to internalise these costs as it targets all tax payers. There should then be an element of polluter pays, perhaps a small charge on road tolls or fuel excise would provide the focus on motorised transport which accounts for 92% of road fatalities.⁵⁰ There could be an update to the Eurovignette Directive⁵¹ to specifically include all motorised traffic and provide earmarking for safety and the running of the ERSA.

⁴⁷ Commission's [Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety](#) and [EU road safety policy framework 2021-2030](#) which also lay out road safety plans aiming to reach zero road deaths by 2050 ('Vision Zero')

⁴⁸ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=legissum:accession_criteria_copenhagen

⁴⁹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9781f65f-8448-11ea-bf12-01aa75ed71a1>

⁵⁰ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/background/road-safety-statistics-2024_en

⁵¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A01999L0062-20220324>

5. Conclusion

Despite consistent efforts at EU and national levels to improve road safety, there continues to be over 20,000 deaths annually on the EU roads, a trend that has not changed for more than a decade. This total far surpasses fatalities in other transport modes. Yet, unlike aviation, rail, and maritime sectors, road transport lacks a dedicated European agency to support the development, coordination, and implementation of effective road safety policy. This structural deficit hampers the EU's capacity to achieve its ambitious Vision Zero objectives and to bring about coherent, evidence-led, and timely action throughout the EU Member States.

This report is an exploratory text giving arguments for a European Road Safety Agency (ERSA), and examples of how it can improve road safety across the EU at different governmental levels.

In summary an ERSA would play a key role in providing critical technical and regulatory expertise to assist policymakers, ensure coherent and harmonised data collection and analysis, and coordinate research and dissemination of best practices. It would also serve as a one-stop shop for Member States, external organisations, and stakeholders, delivering support on implementation, enforcement, training, and public awareness. In addition to dealing with institutional fragmentation, an ERSA could act as an interface between policy and research, enhance the visibility and transparency of safety data, and improve the oversight of vehicle and infrastructure standards and regulations. As new technologies, vehicles, and road uses reshape mobility systems, an ERSA would allow the EU to remain responsive, up-to-date, and aligned with objectives such as sustainable mobility, climate resilience, and urban liveability.

Finally, the implementation of an ERSA is an opportunity to give road safety the institutional weight it needs, securing safer roads for all European citizens and placing safety at the heart of the EU's sustainable transport and mobility agenda.

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