



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**ROAD SAFETY IN INDIA: FROM
STRONGER LAWS TO SAFER ROADS**

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Context

- The fifth anniversary of the **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019**, alongside the Road Accidents in India 2024 report, has renewed focus on India's persistent road-safety crisis.

About Road Safety in India

- Road safety is a **public policy, public health and governance challenge** involving road users, vehicles, infrastructure, enforcement and post-crash care.
- India's rapid urbanisation, motorisation and expansion of road networks have increased mobility but also exposed systemic weaknesses.
- According to the **MoRTH's Road Accidents in India 2024**, nearly **1.77 lakh people lost their lives in road crashes in 2024**.
 - ♦ It underscores the gap between legislative intent and outcomes on the ground.
- The challenge is particularly significant because road crashes disproportionately affect **pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and other vulnerable road users**.
- The **Sundar Committee (2007)** and subsequent reports underscored the need for institutional reforms, higher accountability, and a multi-pronged strategy.

Key Provisions of the MVAA 2019

- The **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019**, effective from September 1, 2019, strengthened India's legal framework through:
 - ♦ Higher penalties for several traffic violations and stronger deterrence against dangerous driving.
 - ♦ Greater accountability of vehicle owners, drivers and other stakeholders.
 - ♦ Protection for **Good Samaritans** who assist crash victims.
 - ♦ Recognition of the critical '**golden hour**' following a road crash.
 - ♦ Strengthened vehicle safety and recall-related provisions.
 - ♦ Greater use of technology and electronic enforcement.
- However, implementation remains uneven. Helmet and seat-belt compliance, child restraint use, enforcement capacity, road engineering and emergency response vary considerably across States.

Achievements and Positive Impacts

- **Digitisation via Vahan and Sarathi platforms** enhanced transparency in licensing and registration.
- **Provisions for Good Samaritans** reduced bystander hesitation. Vehicle safety norms have tightened (mandatory airbags, ABS, seat-belt reminders in newer models).
- On National Highways, 2025 data indicated an nearly **11% reduction in accidents and fatalities compared to 2024** in some reports, attributed to better engineering, black-spot rectification, and enforcement.
- The long-term death rate per 10,000 vehicles has declined even as the vehicle population surged (from ~191 million in 2014 to over 350 million by 2024), indicating some relative safety gains amid rapid motorisation.

Key Legislative Frameworks for Road Safety in India

- **Motor Vehicles Act, 1988**: It is principal legislation governing motor vehicles, licensing, registration and traffic regulation.
- **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019**: It strengthened penalties, accountability, victim protection and enforcement.
- **Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989**: These prescribe operational and safety requirements for vehicles and drivers.

- **National Road Safety Policy, 2010:** It provides a broad policy framework based on awareness, enforcement, engineering, emergency care and research.
- **Motor Vehicle Driving Regulation, 2017** and subsequent safety regulations: These seek to improve driver behaviour and vehicle standards.
 - ♦ Road safety requires coordination under the **4Es** ie **Education, Engineering, Enforcement and Emergency Care**, increasingly supplemented by technology and data.
- **Bharat New Car Assessment Programme (Bharat NCAP):** Star-rating system for vehicle crash safety (operational since ~2023).

What are the Concerns and Issues?

- **Implementation Deficit:** Strong laws do not automatically translate into compliance. Enforcement differs across States and cities.
- **Vulnerable road users:** Pedestrians, cyclists, two-wheeler riders and children face disproportionate risks.
- **Unsafe school transport:** Lack of consistent adherence to safety norms, inadequate child restraints and risky pick-up/drop-off practices threaten children.
- **Road engineering deficiencies:** Accident-prone **black spots**, poor junction design, inadequate pedestrian infrastructure and weak road safety audits remain concerns.
- **Human factors:** Speeding, drunk driving, distracted driving, non-use of helmets/seat belts and fatigue continue to contribute to crashes.
- **Post-crash Care:** Delays in ambulance services, trauma care and coordinated emergency response can convert survivable injuries into fatalities.
- **Data gaps:** Fragmented crash data limits evidence-based identification of dangerous locations, behaviours and interventions.

Global Benchmark

- The global shift is towards the '**Safe System Approach/Vision Zero**', which recognises that humans make mistakes and that road systems should prevent those mistakes from becoming fatal.
- Countries such as **Sweden** have demonstrated the value of combining safer road design, speed management, vehicle safety and institutional accountability.
- The **UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030** seeks to reduce global road deaths and injuries by **at least 50% by 2030**.
- India's approach therefore needs to move beyond blaming individual road users towards designing a **forgiving road system**.

Way Forward: Strengthening Road Safety Framework in India

- **Adopt a Safe System approach:** Integrate safer roads, vehicles, speeds and user behaviour.
- **Strengthen data-driven enforcement:** Use AI-enabled cameras, e-challans, telematics and real-time crash databases to target high-risk behaviour.
- **Eliminate black spots:** Conduct mandatory road safety audits and rapidly rectify hazardous stretches and junctions.
- **Make school travel safer:** Enforce school-bus standards, age-appropriate **child restraint systems**, safe boarding zones and regular vehicle/driver checks.
- **Improve emergency care:** Build integrated ambulance networks, trauma-care capacity and rapid crash reporting to protect the golden hour.
- **Promote safer vehicles:** Encourage advanced driver-assistance systems, pedestrian protection and stronger safety standards.

- **Build behavioural ownership:** Parents, schools, employers, transport operators and communities must treat helmet, seat-belt and child-restraint use as everyday safety practices.
- **Strengthen institutional coordination:** Road safety should be a shared responsibility across transport, police, health, urban development, education and infrastructure agencies.

Conclusion

- The **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019** provided India with a stronger legal foundation, but the persistence of nearly **1.77 lakh road deaths in 2024** shows that legislation alone is insufficient.
- The next phase needs to convert legal provisions into **safer infrastructure, consistent enforcement, safer vehicles, effective emergency care and responsible road behaviour**.
- For a Viksit Bharat, mobility needs not to merely be faster and more accessible, it needs to be **safe, inclusive and life-preserving**.

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the key gaps in the implementation of road-safety measures in India and suggest a Safe System-based approach to make Indian roads safer.

Source: TH

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