

2025 in Review, 2026 in Focus: India's Road Safety Roadmap

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Summary: Key Highlights and Priority Recommendations

India continues to face a significant road safety burden, with over 1.7 lakh fatalities annually and a rising share among vulnerable road users—pedestrians, cyclists, and two-wheeler riders. While 2025 saw gains through stricter regulations, institutional reforms, enhanced enforcement, and data-led interventions, enforcement challenges, uneven compliance, and systemic gaps continue to drive preventable crashes. Speeding accounts for nearly 70% of road crash fatalities, while helmet, seatbelt, and child safety compliance remain weak.

To translate policy momentum into measurable safety outcomes in 2026, the Road Safety Network recommends:

Strengthen the Motor Vehicles Act

While the MVAA 2019 marked a significant step in enhancing road safety, certain gaps remain:

- Guidelines for setting speed limits must be notified, covering both national maximums and state-level limits. (Section 112)
- Penalties for speeding must explicitly cover two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and quadricycles, with graded penalties and stricter punishment for violations in school zones and other sensitive areas. (Section 183)
- Child Restraint Systems (CRS) must be mandatory for children under 12, and children must be prohibited from occupying the front seat. (Section 194B)
- Statutory provisions must include measures already mandated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court (Section 66A): Road Safety Fund, State Road Safety Lead Agency, statutory Action Plan, and audits at all four stages of road construction.

Develop and Notify Scientific Speed Management Guidelines

Over speeding accounts for 70% of road crash fatalities. States must adopt Speed Management Guidelines informed by best practices and scientific evidence. RSN's collaboration with West Bengal demonstrates effectiveness and scalability.

State must Adopt Road Safety Action Plans

All states must develop and adopt comprehensive SMART Action Plans with the overarching target of reducing fatalities and injuries by 50% by 2030. Rajasthan serves as a model.





Launch a National Road Safety Mission

A mission-mode framework will improve coordination, optimize resources, and enable nationwide implementation.



Set-up the National Road Safety Board

Under Section 215B, a fully functional Board must provide data-driven, evidence-based advice and be fully resourced to help India achieve its 2030 target.

A focused, evidence-led push in 2026 is essential to convert reforms into sustained reductions in road crash fatalities and serious injuries.





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1.0 Setting the Context

Road safety in India remains a pressing public health and development crisis, with over 1.5 lakh lives lost each year and millions more affected by injuries and disabilities. Despite policy advances, technological interventions, and awareness efforts, the scale and complexity of the problem demand a more coordinated, evidence-based, and accountable systemic approach.

As the country observes **National Road Safety Month 2026** (1–31 January 2026) under the theme “Sadak Suraksha, Jeevan Raksha,” the urgency of strengthening road safety systems becomes even more pronounced. In this context, the Road Safety Network (RSN) presents this whitepaper to provide a comprehensive review of the key policy shifts, legislative reforms, behavioural trends, and communication patterns seen in 2025, while identifying persistent gaps and opportunities for action.

Looking ahead to 2026, RSN aims to foster an ecosystem that not only consolidates recent reforms but also drives measurable improvements in compliance, enforcement, public awareness, and infrastructure—supporting policymakers, enforcement agencies, civil society, media, and other stakeholders in advancing safer roads and reducing road traffic deaths and injuries.



2.0 A Year in Review – Key Policy Shifts and Legislative Developments in 2025

The year 2025 marked a turning point in India’s road safety landscape. With over 1.5 lakh lives lost annually, central and state governments adopted a more coordinated, scientific, and people-centered approach. Unlike previous years, which largely focused on awareness campaigns, 2025 emphasized stronger enforcement, safer road design, better emergency care, and clear institutional accountability.

2025 began with UN Global Road Safety Week (January 2025), highlighting the need for structural reforms, alignment between enforcement and engineering, and prioritization of vulnerable road users. States strengthened monitoring systems, upgraded infrastructure, and ran campaigns to reinforce the message that road safety is a shared responsibility—between citizens, authorities, and enforcement agencies.

2.1 Stricter Traffic Regulations

From 1 March 2025, multiple states introduced stricter traffic regulations. Penalties were revised significantly (5–10 times higher in many cases), with some including imprisonment and license suspension for serious violations. Examples include:

- Dangerous driving: fines up to ₹10,000 and/or six months imprisonment
- Helmet and seatbelt violations: fines rising to ₹1,000 in many states
- Mobile use while driving: fines up to ₹5,000
- Driving without a valid license: fines around ₹5,000

Several states also launched periodic compliance drives targeting speeding, drunk driving, and helmet non-use.



2.2 Cashless Treatment of Road Accident Victims Scheme



A landmark reform, the Cashless Treatment of Road Accident Victims Scheme, was notified on 5 May 2025 and operationalized on 4 June 2025. Key features:

- Cashless treatment of up to ₹1.5 lakh for the first seven days at designated hospitals nationwide
- Fully digital and paperless platform managed by the National Health Authority (NHA)
- Oversight by a 17-member Steering Committee chaired by the Road Transport Secretary
- ₹272 crore allocated by the Central Government for uninsured cases; insurance covers insured/offending vehicles

Early rollout challenges included delays in hospital empanelment, tariff-related concerns, harmonizing state health systems with NHA's platform, and the need for robust fraud-control and grievance redressal mechanisms.

2.3 Supreme Court Directives & SCCoRS Monitoring

The Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety (SCCoRS) continued to push states toward measurable improvements in helmet and seatbelt compliance, uniform penalties, and removal of encroachments from roads and footpaths. SCCoRS also emphasized regular reporting and city-level monitoring.

On 7 October 2025, the Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment linking pedestrian safety and unobstructed footpaths to Article 21 (Right to Life). The Court directed States and UTs to:

- Frame rules under the Motor Vehicles Act addressing pedestrian safety
- Conduct city-level pedestrian infrastructure audits
- Provide safe crossings, continuous footpaths, and barrier-free access
- Submit compliance reports within time-bound schedules



This judicial recognition significantly strengthened accountability for road-owning agencies and local bodies.

2.4 National Road Safety Policy – Evolving Framework

Although a formally updated 2025 policy has not been notified, the Government of India continued to strengthen the National Road Safety Policy (2010) through new guidance and committee recommendations.

Key focus areas included:

- Engineering and audits: mandatory safety audits on highways, black-spot identification, and time-bound engineering fixes monitored by NHAI, PWDs, and SCCoRS
- Protection of vulnerable road users: promotion of complete streets, continuous footpaths, cycle tracks, and safer intersections, enabled through uniform road design standards across all road types.
- Digital and automated enforcement: AI-enabled cameras, ITS, automated challans, and integrated license–vehicle–insurance databases
- Crash data and investigations: strengthening iRAD, scientific crash investigation protocols, and capacity-building for police, transport, and medical departments
- Education and behaviour change: structured school/college modules aligned with NCERT and MoRTH guidance
- Research and civil society collaboration: partnerships with IITs, technical universities, and civil society for audits, forensics, and data-driven policy inputs



2.5 National Road Safety Board Rules, 2025

The National Road Safety Board Rules, 2025, notified on 27 October 2025, established a permanent expert body to guide standards for:

- Road design and traffic engineering
- Vehicle safety
- Enforcement processes
- Driver training systems
- Crash data and investigation protocols
- Emergency response standards



2.6 MoRTH 2023 Road Accidents Report and Its Relevance

Experts call for state action plans to curb road accidents

Chennai: The Road Safety Network (RSN), a collective of road safety advocates, civil society organizations, and policy experts from across India, released a whitepaper calling for urgent policy reforms to cut road fatalities by 50% by 2030.

In an online session on Thursday, attended by experts from Anna University, Chennai Unified Metropolitan Development Authority (CUMTA), Indian Road Congress, and IIT-Kharagpur, the panel members stressed the need to launch a national road safety mission, adopt speed management norms and draft legally binding state action plans to ensure accountability.

The session follows the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' report on road accidents in 2023, released last month, which stated that Tamil Na-

Panel sought safer street design, improved lighting, modernization of crash data system via real-time platforms, and enabling evidence-based planning

du logged 67,213 road accidents — the highest among all states — and lost 18,347 lives (second highest). Nationally, India recorded 480,583 road crashes and 172,890 deaths, accounting for nearly 11% of global fatalities despite owning just 1% of the world's vehicles.

The panellists pointed out pedestrians, cyclists and two-wheeler riders make up nearly 68% of all road deaths. Safer street design, improved lighting, modernization of crash data system

through real-time platforms, and enabling evidence-based planning and transparent policy documentation were the other recommendations made.

Road safety expert Ravishankar said CUMTA recommended three priorities to reduce fatalities: improving quality of police accident data and reporting for better cause analysis, ensuring stricter compliance with helmet use under the Motor Vehicles Act, and holding road-owning agencies accountable for adhering to safety engineering standards through regular audits.

"Tamil Nadu has continued to lead in road crashes for the sixth year in a row, pointing to an urgent need for intervention," said Nina Subramani of Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG). TNN

The MoRTH "Road Accidents in India 2023" report, released in August 2025, highlighted:

- 480,583 road crashes and 172,890 fatalities—the highest annual toll ever recorded
- High fatalities among two-wheeler riders, pedestrians, and other vulnerable road users
- Recurring causes: speeding, non-use of helmets/seatbelts, and sub-standard road conditions

These findings underscored the urgency of reforms, providing a strong evidence base for enhanced enforcement, safety audits, improved engineering, institutional reforms, and data modernization.

Table 1: From MoRTH Annual Road Accidents Reports

Road-user category Persons	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% change 2016-2023
Pedestrian	15,746	20,457	22,656	25,858	23,483	29,124	32,825	35,221	124%
Bicycles	2,585	3,559	3,673	4,196	4,167	4,702	4,836	4,560	76%
Two-wheelers	52,500	48,746	55,336	56,136	57,282	69,385	74,897	77,539	48%
Auto-Rickshaws	7,150	7,167	6,629	6,655	5,086	5,966	6,596	6,308	-12%
Cars, Taxis, Vans and LMVs	26,923	26,869	25,115	23,900	18,095	19,811	21,040	21,496	-20%
Trucks/Lorries	16,876	17,158	15,150	13,532	9,824	9,476	10,584	10,066	-40%
Buses	9,969	9,069	8,164	6,529	3,001	3,106	4,004	3,956	-60%
Other (NMVs)	3,048	3,478	3,585	3,065	3,312	2,283	2,372	2,006	-34%
Others	15,988	11,410	11,109	11,242	7,464	10,119	11,337	11,738	-27%
Total	150,785	147,913	151,417	151,113	131,714	153,972	168,491	172,890	12%

The table above indicates that while there has been a **30% decline in road fatalities amongst non-vulnerable road users**, there has been a **66% increase in road fatalities amongst vulnerable road users**: namely pedestrians, cyclists and two-wheeler riders.

The steepest increase in fatalities is amongst pedestrians while two-wheeler fatalities dominate in terms of absolute numbers.

3.0 Behavioural and Compliance Trends: Key Challenges in India’s Road Safety Landscape

India’s road safety outcomes continue to be shaped by deep-rooted behavioural and compliance gaps, which remain a major driver of the country’s high burden of crashes and fatalities. Official data from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways indicates that in 2023, India recorded 4.80 lakh road crashes and 1.73 lakh fatalities, with deaths increasing further to 1.77 lakh in 2024. This persistent and rising toll underscores the limited effectiveness of existing compliance mechanisms and the need for stronger behavioural interventions alongside enforcement.

Significant state-level variations are also evident. Uttar Pradesh accounts for the highest share of road fatalities, while Tamil Nadu records the highest number of crashes. These differences point to the need for state-specific compliance and enforcement strategies, implemented within a coherent national policy framework.



3.1 Behavioural Risk Factors Driving Crash Severity

- Behavioural risk factors remain the leading contributors to road deaths in India.
- Over-speeding alone accounted for 70% of all fatalities in 2024, making it the most significant behavioural determinant of crash severity.

3.2 Fatality Risk on Highway Corridors

- Speed-related risks are particularly concentrated on highways.
- National Highways, despite comprising just over 2% of the total road network, accounted for 36.5% of all deaths in 2023.
- On these corridors, more than 72% of crashes and fatalities were linked to excessive speed.

3.3 Compliance Gaps in Speed Management

- Enforcement intensity and road context continue to strongly influence driver behaviour.
- Widespread non-compliance with posted speed limits indicates gaps in how limits are set, communicated, and enforced. An over-reliance on average-speed enforcement allows drivers to offset high speeds in certain stretches, instead of encouraging consistent adherence to safe, context-based speed limits.
- The high number of crashes on straight road sections shows that perceived “open” or “safe” environments often encourage risky behaviour in the absence of:
 - > self-explanatory road design
 - > consistent enforcement

3.4 Safety Gear Compliance Deficits



- Safety gear compliance remains persistently low.

Helmet and seatbelt non-use:

- Non-use of helmets contributed to over 54,000 deaths in 2023.
- Non-use of seatbelts resulted in more than 16,000 fatalities in 2023.
- While awareness of helmet laws is relatively high, gaps persist in:
 - > correct use
 - > consistent use
 - > use among pillion riders and children remain limited

3.5 Child Safety and Caregiver Behaviour Challenges

- Child safety compliance is especially weak.
- Many parents perceive child restraint systems (CRS) as inconvenient or unaffordable.
- Limited availability of child safety products and unclear legal guidance further reduces compliance.

3.6 School Zone and School Transport Compliance Issues

School-related road safety challenges include:

- Safe School Zones often lack:
 - > appropriate signage
 - > traffic calming measures
 - > adequate pedestrian and cyclists infrastructure
- Enforcement of school-zone speed limits is inconsistent

School transport compliance gaps:

- Issues persist in:
 - > permit validity
 - > unauthorised vehicle modifications
 - > insufficient real-time monitoring



Strengthening behavioural compliance requires a sharper focus on speed management through clear, science-based guidelines, consistent enforcement of penalties, and supportive road design. Improving helmet, seatbelt, and child restraint compliance requires clearer legal provisions, better product standards, and targeted enforcement. Integrating Safe School Zone standards and school transport monitoring into routine district enforcement can significantly reduce risk for children without major regulatory changes.

4.0 Communications & Awareness Audit (2025)

Understanding how road safety is communicated is essential, as messaging shapes perceptions of risk, accountability, and the systemic nature of crashes.

4.1 Key Observations

- Road crashes are frequently termed “accidents,” framing them as unavoidable and shifting focus to individual error rather than systemic causes. Using the term “crashes” reinforces that such incidents are preventable, and a consistent shift in terminology is necessary to promote accountability and prevention-oriented policies.
- Structural and systemic factors—limited speed management, road design deficiencies, compliance gaps, and enforcement inconsistencies—are seldom highlighted.
- Public awareness initiatives have often been irregular, with limited rural reach and less focus on critical safety issues such as helmets, seatbelts, speeding, school zones, and child protection. Sustained national-level road safety campaigns, similar in reach to “Janhit Mein Jaari” and the Pulse Polio programme, promoting helmet and seatbelt use, child restraints, pedestrian right-of-way, stop-line and signal compliance, and avoidance of speeding, drink-driving, underage driving and triple riding, can build lasting grassroots adherence rather than fragmented, short-term efforts.
- News media coverage often focuses on immediate outcomes like fatalities and injuries, with fewer reporting on systemic causes, policy gaps, and enforcement challenges.
- Limited access to accurate data and technical reports constrains evidence-based reporting.



4.2 Media and Communication: Recommended Approaches

To strengthen public understanding and promote safer behaviour, media communication on road safety should follow these approaches:

- Provide media professionals with orientation and resources to improve coverage, emphasizing data trends, systemic causes, road design issues, and enforcement gaps, rather than solely individual errors.
- Ensure communication is evidence-based and uses clear, simple language for broader understanding.
- Consistently refer to incidents as “crashes” not “accidents” since they are preventable. Provide examples that explain underlying systemic factors.
- Design campaigns linked to compliance level and measurable behavioural outcomes, enabling evaluation of impact.



5.0 RSN Road Safety Policy & Action Recommendations 2026

Building on insights into public understanding, behavioural patterns, and systemic gaps—and drawing from crash data, compliance trends, and communication audits—RSN proposes a set of strategic policy and action recommendations for 2026.

These recommendations align with India’s national efforts of reducing road traffic fatalities and injuries by 50% by 2030 and are intended to guide focused, evidence-based efforts in the years ahead.

1. Strengthen the Motor Vehicles Act

While the MVAA 2019 marked a significant step in enhancing road safety, certain gaps remain:

- Guidelines for setting speed limits must be notified, covering both national maximums and state-level limits. (Section 112)
- Penalties for speeding must explicitly cover two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and quadricycles, with graded penalties based on the degree of speeding and stricter punishment for violations in school zones and other sensitive areas. (Section 183)
- Child Restraint Systems (CRS) must be mandatory for children under 12, and children must be prohibited from occupying the front seat. (Section 194B)

- Statutory provisions must include measures already mandated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court (Section 66A)
 - > Establishment and utilisation of a Road Safety Fund
 - > Formation of a State-level Road Safety Lead Agency.
 - > Creation of a statutory state and district Road Safety Action Plan
 - > Mandating Road Safety Audits at all four stages of road construction and maintenance

2. Develop and Notify Scientific Speed Management Guidelines

Speeding consistently accounts for 70% of road crash fatalities. Setting and enforcing appropriate speed limits can help reduce both the probability of a crash as well as its severity. This can be implemented quickly at a low cost. To help State-level agencies to be able to set speed limits that prioritize safety, considering the nature of the road, the adjoining land-use and other relevant factors, States must develop and notify Speed Management Guidelines informed by best practices and scientific evidence. RSN's collaboration with the Government of West Bengal demonstrates the effectiveness of such guidelines, providing a model for adoption in other states.



3. State must Adopt Road Safety Action Plans

The Hon'ble Supreme Court directed States to prepare a Road Safety Action Plan in 2017. While many States prepared such plans, they lacked appropriate details and remained largely on paper. All states must develop and adopt comprehensive Road Safety Action Plans afresh, with the overarching target of reducing road crash fatalities and injuries by 50% by 2030 in line with global commitments. The State of Rajasthan has recently developed such a plan and can serve as a model for other States. These plans must be SMART—defining responsibilities for relevant agencies, establishing measurable annual targets, and ensuring allocation of necessary resources.

4. Launch a National Road Safety Mission



The Government must adopt a mission-mode approach to meet its commitment of reducing road traffic fatalities and injuries by half by 2030. A dedicated National Road Safety Mission would improve coordination across ministries, optimize resource mobilization, and ensure road safety is addressed nationwide. Lessons from past missions, such as the National Health Mission, demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach.

5. Set-up the National Road Safety Board

The Ministry added the provision for creating a National Road Safety Board in the Motor Vehicles Amendment Act 2019 (Section 215B) to “render advice to the Central or State Government on all aspects pertaining to road safety and traffic management”. In October 2025 the Government notified the National Road Safety Board Rules, 2025.

In order to ensure that Government actions, policies and priorities are data-driven and evidence-based, drawing from global best practices, a fully functional National Road Safety Board must be set-up at the earliest. The Board must be fully resourced to be able to fulfil its responsibilities and help India achieve its 2030 target.



6.0 Conclusion

This whitepaper underscores the need for an integrated approach that combines policy, engineering, enforcement, and public awareness while fostering shared responsibility among all road users and stakeholders.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Road Safety Network envisions accelerating these efforts through targeted interventions, state-specific strategies, and collaborative initiatives that translate policy intent into measurable reductions in road traffic deaths and injuries. By building on the reforms and lessons of 2025, India can move closer to its 2030 vision of safer roads for all.





Road Safety Network (RSN) is a national coalition of NGOs, CSO, educational institutions, road safety experts striving for safer roads.

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Road Safety Network India,
Yamuna, ICS Colony, Ganeshkhind road,
Pune 411007

Contact us at
Email: roadsafetynetwork@gmail.com
www.roadsafetynetwork.in



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