

Safe System Approach Needed to Address Road Safety Problems

In recent years, the U.S. has seen an epidemic of roadway injuries and fatalities. Traditional safety measures have not worked to stem this tide. In the first half of 2021 alone, motor vehicle deaths increased by 16 percent compared with the previous year, according to the National Safety Council.

We need to apply public health principles and systems science in our work to equip current and future transportation professionals and stakeholders with more effective tools to solve complex safety challenges. Multidisciplinary work by many advances Safe System concepts — such as accounting for human vulnerabilities and human behavior to proactively limit the chance of fatal injury — for all road users.

What is a Safe System?

A Safe System approach is built around six principles, and should be designed to:

- Adapt the system to human behavior
- Manage kinetic energy
- Treat safety as the foundation for all interventions
- Create a shared vision and coordinate actions
- Explore system gaps and interactions
- Provide frameworks for community engagement and risk management

Multidisciplinary collaboration is the bedrock of creating a Safe System. Researchers, policymakers, private industry, safety non-profits, and multiple other stakeholders have to work together to further this important work.



Time to Accelerate Our Work

Over the last few years we have seen wide-scale interest in the Safe System approach — it is no longer such a novel concept in the U.S. The Safe System approach has even been codified into state and national legislation and policy. At HSRC, we believe the future of safe transportation will require a Safe System approach, and we are proud to have helped provide the “why” and “how” this vision for a safer road system for all can become a reality in the U.S.

There is still work to do. It’s time to accelerate our progress in implementing a Safe System to transform the transportation network. The safety of our roads depends on it.