AARTO - THE KEY TO ENSURING SUCCESSFUL ROAD SAFETY SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

A major part of transport infrastructure planning and systems involves dealing with driver attitude – personified in risky / dangerous / bad behaviour.

The success of any macro transport related initiative has its foundation in the quality of resources at its disposal, the organizational support systems and the clarity of cause and effect when addressing the desired outcome (goal). The strategic goal far outweighs the size of budget and quantity of equipment available – as well as the quotation factor of fines as opposed to behavioural change.

Attitudes towards societal norms are often manifest in "lessor" transgressions – traffic violations being a good barometer of this (of perceived acceptable behaviour as opposed to being punished by society). Attitude change in road users is dependent on three intrinsic issues: integrity, responsibility and accountability.

This paper will endeavour to define the process that should be followed in effectively managing road safety issues in the persuit of establishing a viable and sustainable transport infrastructure programme, based on cause and effect – not on violation and reaction.

Further to these issues a brief look will be taken at how traffic management systems will be redefined to achieve maximum impact on the primary factors related to bad levels of safety on the roads, which will ultimately impact on infrastructure and public transport policies. This will include:

- Partnerships in delivering safer roads;
- Management of responsibility in policing transport;
- Public transportation supporting tougher policing; and
- Delivering on the White Paper on Transport.

1. THE PRESENT SITUATION

For a number of years there has been talk at various levels and conferences regarding the "standards", "quality", "methods" or the "effectiveness" of traffic management systems. Over the past twenty years, the fabric of traffic management has seen changes in technology (computer assisted and driven devices), methodology (application of fully automated equipment) and focus (identified safety issues or behaviour patterns). This is especially true of traffic policing.

The criminology or societal norms adherence aspect of traffic policing is often overlooked in the rush to achieve short-term goals (proof of contravention statistics or better fine

collection). The actual prevalence of contraventions points to entrenched attitude and behavioural patterns – developed and nurtured in the sole interest of the driver or operator – not in the interest of safer transport.

Attitudes towards societal norms often manifest in "lesser" transgressions – traffic violations being a good barometer of this (of perceived acceptable behaviour as opposed to being punished by society).

During the latter half of the 1990s, the Department of Transport engaged the well-known Arrive Alive programme – aimed at turning around the appalling state on the roads. From 2000, Arrive Alive began heavier concentration on policing – and the advent of statistics relating to how many notices (tickets) were issued dawned. This was, in itself, deemed proof of the impact of the campaign and of what road users were up to.

The result of this has been the label that is now attached to road safety related drives – a money spinning endeavour aimed at "soft" targets (the speedsters). Graphic representation of policing activities over the years shows a very skewed picture in this regard.

The incidence of driving whilst under the influence of an intoxicating substance (drunken driving) did not even receive a similar amount of attention (although it was reported at a similar rate to vehicle contraventions).

With the advent of 2000, road safety in South Africa was faced with two major challenges it had never had before – the advent of traffic law enforcement openly linked to budget balancing at local government level and the total breakdown in the respect of the law by road users.

The Department of Transport launched the Road to Safety Strategy in 2001 aimed at addressing serious policy and implementation issues linked to bad road safety conditions (as determined by crash statistics, workshops and various other stakeholder and public forums).

It is important to note here, that any macro road safety objective has its foundation in the quality of resources at its disposal, the organizational support systems and the clarity of cause and effect when addressing the steps towards the desired strategic goal. This strategic goal far outweighs budget and quantity of equipment available – as well as totals of fines issued as opposed to behavioural change.

A major part of the Road to Safety Strategy involves dealing with attitudes. With regard to drivers, this entails behaviour personified in risky / dangerous / bad behaviour, whilst corruptible / fraudulent and illegal practices are targeted in individuals responsible for ensuring and maintaining standards, implementing policy or allowing access to the road network.

However, the success of the Strategy is based on compliance (both voluntary and induced) and, whether we are willing to accept this or not, the realisation that public acceptance or "buy-in" will only occur once tangible and meaningful progress for the road user has become apparent. Success is thus dependent on attitude change, and attitude change in road users is dependent on three intrinsic issues: integrity, responsibility and accountability.

It is in terms of these three concepts that this paper will endeavour to define the process that should be followed in effectively managing road safety issues in the pursuit of

establishing a viable and sustainable transport infrastructure programme, based on cause and effect – not on violation and reaction.

Further to these issues a brief look will be taken at how traffic management systems will be redefined to achieve maximum impact on the primary factors related to bad levels of safety on the roads, which will ultimately impact on infrastructure and public transport policies. This will include:

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2. PARTNERSHIPS IN DELIVERING SAFER ROADS

Who are the partners in delivering safer roads? To my mind there are three central players:

1) The Advisors (communication specialists, educators and police);
2) The Facilitators (engineers, scientists, inventors and the regulators); and
3) The Users (you and I at any given point).

Let's look at the first group. We all are acutely aware of the various stigma and perceptions that haunt traffic policing - some of them being unfairly earned whilst others sit justly around their necks.

The first idea that springs to mind is that of the attitude of the general public towards traffic officers. We often debate why this is so. Is it because the communicators and educators are broadcasting the WRONG message? Should they be telling us of what will happen if you transgress the law, or should they be telling us HOW we should play our part.

This brings to mind the crucial issue "What exactly is the role of the traffic officer / Why do we have traffic officers?"

The answer to this is quite simple: to ensure safe and unhindered passage of traffic. In other words, traffic policing is one arm of the Advisors that has as its primary task, the assistance of all road users in getting to their destinations safely, quickly and with the least amount of exposure to certain hazardous risks (dangerous goods transportation, for example).

Why then have traffic officers become the bane and pet hate of road users?

Simple again: part of their task in ensuring that all may travel safely is the minimizing or removal of high risk factors (behaviour or actions that increase the risk of a collision / life threatening event or the hampering of the smooth flow of traffic).

Enter the speed timing issue (commonly known as speed trapping) – thereby giving rise to the more common name for traffic officers: "speed cops". However, officers also check the safety condition of motor vehicles, drivers as well as the loads (goods or people) that are being transported.

The traffic officer is seen as being a spoilsport and a nuisance as the very behaviour road users enjoy and pride themselves in (and which is then counter-acted upon by the officer) is contrary to every other road user's right to safe and unhindered travel.

Traffic officers don't "punish" or serve notices (fines) because actions of road users are contrary to the law, but because the respective road users need to be motivated (albeit negatively) to stop the activity so as to pose no further threat or danger to others on the roads.

Do we clearly and consistently tell road users this?

3. MANAGEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY IN POLICING TRANSPORT

The rationale behind AARTO (which is a system) has been debated at length. There are numerous countries around the world which have followed a similar process. Notably, the United Kingdom and Australia have followed the points penalty system. Many other countries followed suit later (Republic of Ireland, Germany, Sweden, France, etc).

The basis is quite simple: a) the addressing of the behaviours which lead to road crashes / accident (injuries and deaths are seen differently around the world in terms of final outcomes to programmes) and b) holding people accountable to their actions in terms of raising the risk level for other road users.

Australia (notably the state of Victoria) linked an intensive law enforcement campaign to their drive for safer roads. This was linked to a penalty system which resulted in the forfeiture of a driver's licence should all points be lost (in their model).

Although this had a marked affect on driving patterns in the early 1990's, latest research has shown that the statistics are beginning to climb again.

The United Kingdom started the points system in the middle 1980's and has had a varied success rate. The latest phenomenon to appear is the "buying" of points – a driver will pay someone else to "take" points for an offence. There are cases where up to 30 000 pounds have been paid in an effort to sidestep having a licence revoked or cancelled.

In both scenarios, however, there were tougher levels of law enforcement – ie there were active programmes involved and the police actually committed themselves to stopping the accident rates (not necessarily the deaths).

Their action / activity was aimed at reducing the risk by addressing the behaviour that caused the problems in the first place.

There are many who believe that speed does not kill and then link this argument to the call to end speed timing (speed trapping) – many times the issue surrounding astronauts heading into space is produced as "proof". This may be cognitively unfathomable to many – but in its true form, speed does not kill.

In this scenario (perfect conditions) we accept that all the hazards and dangers that influence and raise the risk of collision / damage to person and property are non-existent. Then, yes, speed is not a factor in contributing towards collisions.

However, once variables are applied, the picture changes. A variable can be anything as "innocent" as a gentle curve / gust of wind / loss of concentration to the more formidable issues of bad weather / undependable pedestrians / animals / intoxication / mechanical failure, etc.

It is, therefore, paramount that excessive speed is addressed in areas where the risk / danger potential is raised due to higher speeds. This principle must also be applied to the

process of setting speed limits (the ceiling level of speed). The 85th percentile seems to have disappeared from all considerations.

Enter into the foray the perception that speed is "unfairly targeted" or that speed timing (speed trapping) is purely income generation motivated. This is easily dispelled by clearly communicating the areas where speed timing is implemented have bad collision records due to the heightened risk.

The general public are constantly reminded that speed kills (which is not true on its own), are confronted with traffic offices "hiding" behind any concealment whilst performing their duties and encounter speed timing in remote and relatively risk-free environs.

We then are confused or astounded that the general public view traffic law enforcement in this manner (all activity is linked to the "speed cop" actions). Outrage and controversy can be the only outcome when the road user views that set of events.

Speed timing has also been greatly automated and improved over the last 10 years – gone are the gatsometers and stopwatches, in are the lazars, video cameras and digital technologies. Just a way to get more tickets per minute, decries the road user.

As this equipment has become more readily available, and as demand has grown - cheaper too, so has the emergence of "private companies" to assist police agencies in collecting all the revenue.

It is also far easier to defend police action in court around speed timing than it is in instances of reckless / negligent driving, drunken driving, etc. Thus officers are more prone to manning speed timing devices than they are in tackling "tougher" issues where detailed burden of proof is required for successful prosecution of offenders.

Is there still any confusion as to why speed timing (trapping) is perceived as receiving undue attention from the authorities? This, then, brings us to the first intrinsic issue: integrity.

We need to ensure that all traffic law enforcement activities are solely aimed at addressing factors that contribute to raising the chance of serious or fatal consequences for road users. When road users realize that speed timing is done in areas where speed is the overall contributing factor to collisions, then the battle has been won.

Better still, make all speed timing operations as visible as possible (brightly marked) and the hazardous areas will begin to manage themselves (the habitual / unrelenting offender notwithstanding).

3.1 Drunken Driving: What are we Trying to Achieve?
This is quite simple: it is an undisputed fact that driving under the influence of an intoxicating substance (like alcohol) is dangerous - to the driver, the passengers and all other road users. Period. Irrespective of how many drinks "Person A" can have in relation to "Person B" and still stay sober, drinking alcohol and driving a vehicle / walking in the road are potentially fatal combinations.

Once again, in the context of road users, a heated debate has ensued around what is the maximum number of drinks one needs to have before you are too drunk to drive. This is not the issue – the fact is that even after one intake of alcohol, the vision, reaction and judgment of an individual become impaired.

Recent statistics show that more than 60% of all collisions (vehicle and pedestrian related) have a common denominator - alcohol. In most cases, the persons involved were not necessarily over the legal limit. That, in itself points to a significant fact - ANY alcohol usage (linked to road usage) is dangerous.

Further to this, drink-driving law enforcement is not aimed at "drunk" individuals *per sae* – i.e. those who are over the legal limit of 0,05% or 0,02% as the case may be, but it is aimed at attitudinal change by focusing road users on the second intrinsic issue – responsibility.

This part of traffic law enforcement places the spotlight firmly on the road user with the primary aim of changing perceptions and attitudes towards using intoxicating substances in conjunction with road usage. The message is simple: responsibility for one's own actions and the acknowledgement that these actions affect other road users.

Drink and driving law enforcement is aimed at changing the attitude from careless abandon in alcohol usage to one of acknowledged responsibility in the knowledge that even one drink could be fatal.

If this is the case, the task of traffic policing agencies is clear – stamp out alcohol and road usage as much as possible. More importantly, we need to address this issue continuously, not just around the festive season or holiday periods, as has been the perceived norm.

4. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SUPPORTING TOUGHER POLICING

The question now at hand is: where to in the future should we wish to attain the final intrinsic issue – accountability.

As we all well know, South Africa faces the challenge of a high rate of non-compliance with traffic regulations, coupled with a continuous downward trend in the finalisation of offences and a judicial system unable to prioritise and effectively deal with traffic infringements. The following factors contribute to the high number of traffic offences:

- Public attitude towards road safety;
- Lack of effective and consistent policing;
- Poor road conditions;
- Poor driving skills / bad driving habits;
- Poor roadworthiness of vehicles;
- Pedestrian and / or animal presence; and
- Rapid urbanization.

There will be little or no attitudinal (and therefore perceptional and behavioural) change unless persons are held individually and collectively accountable for their actions (as the need may arise). This infers that the road users will have accepted (both consciously and sub-consciously) the first two intrinsic values: integrity of the system and responsibility for actions.

All that remains, is the acceptance of accountability for consequence of actions.

The Administrative Adjudication of Road Traffic Offences (AARTO) Act, Act 46 of 1998, makes provision for the establishment of the Road Traffic Infringement Agency (RTIA). Briefly, the objectives of this act are to:

- Raise compliance with laws regulating road traffic and to promote road safety;
- Ensure the payment of penalties (fines) and to allow alleged offenders to make representations;
- Effectively and expeditiously adjudicate infringements;
- Alleviate the burden on the courts;
- Penalise drivers and operators who are guilty of infringements or offences through the imposition of demerit points leading to the suspension and cancellation of driving licenses, professional driving permits or operating cards;
- Reward law-abiding behaviour by reducing demerit points if imposed infringements or offences are not committed over specified periods.

Why are speeding and drinking seen to be the keys to successful traffic management? These two issues are pointers – not to how many offences are committed on the roads daily, but to the attitude level of road users.

When these are effectively addressed (not only in law enforcement terms), and when these become the exception more than the norm, then a true step forward has been made in terms of changing the perception of the public and the way in which each and every person will use the road.

The three intrinsic issues need to be addressed and firmly planted into the sub-conscious of all road users – thereby ensuring co-ownership of the ideal of safe transport for all. Road safety has always been a soft issue, an intermittent concept, and a nice to have in the eyes of many road users.

The White Paper on transport refers very clearly to (amongst other things) safe transport. This was further highlighted in the White Paper when reference was made to road traffic control:

"Traffic control (law enforcement) is a priority of traffic management, due to a severe breakdown in discipline on the roads, which in turn leads to unsafe conditions ………." Need we say more? This, in itself, shows why action on the roads is vitally necessary.

The closing paragraph of the late Minister Omar's foreword to the Road to Safety sums up the reasoning behind attitude change:

" …… The conscious and responsible participation of all road users, from pre-primary school students upwards, is what is required. This means you and me; your family and mine; our friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Building a road culture of safety, care and compassion means – and can only mean – zero tolerance towards the slightest element of infringement."

Making the punishment fit the crime: tougher, more uniform driver penalties, new sentencing options, efficient fine collection

The Minister of Transport began a process of consultation with the Minister of Justice and the National Director of Public Prosecutions in 2001, aimed at restoring credibility to sentencing patterns in respect of driving violations. The problems that needed to be overcome were:

- The wide discrepancies in the penalties imposed by different magistrates (or applied in different jurisdictions) for the same types of driving offence;
- Sentencing norms for the majority of serious traffic violations were generally

too low to be adequately prohibitive;

- Sentences needed to be more appropriately attuned to the differential capacity of offenders to pay - hence creating the need for alternative sentencing options;
- The majority of notices issued for road offences did not result in payment of the fines imposed, or response to summonses to appear in court.

The following measures are therefore being implemented to rectify the situation:

- A thorough review of the sentences available for the various categories of offence;
- An intensive information sharing exercise with magistrates' clusters on the impact of road crashes on individuals, the heath and emergency services and the economy;
- The National Director of Public Prosecutions directive to magistrates' clusters defining acceptable sentencing bands for the various offences - without removing the magistrate's overall sentencing discretion;
- Introducing new sentencing options - particularly for offences like excessive speeding, reckless driving and driving under the influence. These could, for certain categories of offence, include community service, impoundment of the vehicle and/or automatic licence suspension, linked to a compulsory advanced/defensive driving training course and a full re-test. None of the above should be seen to exclude the possibility of imprisonment.
- The launch of the Road Traffic Infringement Agency - which will take routine offences out of the overcrowded court system, introduce an efficient fine collection system and give effect to the Points Demerit System on the Credit Card Format driving licence.

5. DELIVERING ON THE WHITE PAPER ON TRANSPORT

Road traffic as a focus area of transport policy is concerned with the quality of road vehicles (including motorised and non-motorised vehicles); drivers of vehicles; operators of vehicles; pedestrians; road traffic operations; the road environment; and interaction in the traffic network (including the mutual interaction between road users and the interaction between road users, the road infrastructure, and the road environment).

The concept "road traffic quality" encompasses traffic safety; traffic discipline; the protection of the road infrastructure and the environment; administrative order in road traffic; and economic order in road traffic.

The "functional areas of road traffic management" are: road traffic control (law enforcement); adjudication of traffic offences; enhancement of road user knowledge, skills and attitudes; incident management; road traffic engineering (including transport and traffic engineering, traffic operations management, and road vehicle engineering); and support functions (including traffic legislation, information management, licensing and registration, and road traffic related research and development).

5.1 Strategic Objectives

The strategic objective in road traffic is to promote and implement efficient, integrated, and co-ordinated road traffic management systems in the country, involving the role-players in all functional areas of road traffic management. The aim is:

- To improve road traffic safety
- To enhance road traffic discipline
- To protect the expensive capital investment in the road system
- To enhance administrative and economic order in the field of road traffic and transport

5.2 Road Traffic Safety

The unacceptable traffic conditions on South African roads, and especially the high accident and casualty rates, must not continue.

Road traffic safety is not a function in itself, but rather the result of the efficient and harmonious operation of road and traffic related management systems, functions, and activities developed and implemented with the purpose of improving quality in road traffic.

After a critical review of the situation and the manner in which road traffic safety is currently managed, it is evident that a stronger approach will be needed to effect a more drastic improvement in road user discipline and reduce collisions.

Adjudication of Traffic Offences

Traffic control is incomplete without the finalisation of prosecutions in courts or through administrative sanction. The effective co-operation between the traffic control and adjudication functions is therefore an essential component of traffic management.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The Current Situation

The Implementation of the AARTO Act has been on the table since 1998. It has become critical to implement the points demerit system as the Road to Safety Strategy has been built around the principles and systems of AARTO and any further delays in implementation will negatively impact on projects such as E-FORCE and Periodic Vehicle Testing.

RTIA establishment as provided for by the Act, must precede the initiation of the adjudication process in terms of the initiation of the demerit point system. The dilemma is: eight years of non-implementation have left little scope to delay the process any further.

6.2 The Way Forward

To ensure the implementation of AARTO as soon as possible, it will be critical to separate the administrative adjudication process and the information management system functions.

The Act refers only to the former and makes reference to the latter in the following manner:

Section 4 (6): *The agency must, in order to properly perform its functions, establish the prescribed information management system and database which is connected with the national contraventions register, and utilise such database to create, process and maintain records with regard to any action performed by it in terms of this Act.*

The Department has already separated the Information Management System from the administrative adjudication function, and has developed this system internally. This will allow for the system to be put in place and piloted in advance, pending a decision on the creation of another Agency in the Department.

Key functions during the pilot phase:

- Standardisation of fines for infringements and offences (in process);
- Classification of minor and major infringements (completed February 2006);
- Point demerit classification for infringements, offences, suspensions and revocation (in process);
- Pay point system activated (completed February 2006);
- Develop a information management system and database (completed May 2006);
- Enabling of a paperless environment (completed May 2006);
- Integration of external systems (in process – some completed in May 2006);
- Minimise human intervention (in process);

System has been developed in such a manner that:

- It is fully operational (including the points demerit system);
- The operational and management structures are defined;
- It is integrated into eNATIS and will be operational in all authorities (but will be rolled out on a sequential expanding basis);
- The system can interface with any traffic policing operation as well as Periodic Vehicle Testing.

6.3 The Key

A solution of road traffic problems can only be reached if the need to focus on the human aspects of road traffic is fully recognised. The improvement of road user knowledge, skills and attitudes as a road traffic management function must be targeted as a priority.

We need to view the process of change as unlocking the potential of the country in terms of sustainable growth of a safe transport infrastructure, as well as in terms of improving general perceptions towards crime and societal norms.

Some of you here today may be facing this scenario – some may have already passed through it and are doing well. Some may be continuing along without any problems.

In South Africa it is time for change. Paradigm change. This change involves the following:

a) Accountability – someone or some institution needs to be held accountable for the situation and has to do something about it;

b) Responsibility – the role players that are responsible for the situation need to be addressed (the police for what they DO NOT do, road users for what they DO (ie behaviour that causes the accidents), road authorities for what they DO NOT do, etc;

c) Scientific data – many of the programmes run (operational or awareness) are based on hearsay – no real scientific basis is available and this would make it much easier to sell safety in the first instance, and to "prove" why actions are done in the second instance;

d) Public perception – societal acceptance of the fact that some behaviour is "bad" and that action will be taken and that it is not acceptable to behave in this manner;

e) Finally – that government puts in place systems to alleviate the burden on the roads, has a system that can be used in place of individual motorized transport and has the system which will be used when privileges are withdrawn.

If we want to improve on road usage attitude in the near future, we need to adopt the best of thinking, tailor our efforts to suit the goals we have set and make traffic management as easy, as affordable and as outcomes driven as possible.

Since our choice of how we experience the challenge of change will define our reality, let us choose methods that will encourage attitudes that will empower and encourage all road users to become individual and collective support for safer road behaviour – thereby leading to what we all strive for. Safer roads.

I would like to end by saying that if we have the courage and the perseverance, we will reach our goal. So lets set our course and stay with it. No matter what happens, we must not give up; we must keep going and, sooner or later, we will reach our goal.

This is both a challenge, and a promise.

I wish you a productive and enlightening conference.

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