Better Roads without Endangering Lives: Using Road Safety Audits to Maximise Development Impacts

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The World Bank and other donors have long recognized that road safety is a critical issue for transport projects in developing countries. Inadequate consideration of road safety disproportionately affects the less well-off members of the population; the very groups which development institutions are attempting to lift from poverty. One way that road safety can effectively be addressed is through road safety audits (RSA). However, the systematic use of RSAs is often lacking, and when done, RSAs are often completed too late in the project for their potential to be fully realised.

To address these challenges, the World Bank with support from the Global Road Safety Facility (GRSF) recently trialled the systematic application of multi-stage RSAs on several projects in the Pacific Islands. These projects integrated road safety into the project design from the outset, undertaking RSAs at feasibility, detailed design and post construction stages.

This innovative approach helped to overcome the design inertia which has been observed, that is a reluctance by stakeholders to revisit designs to incorporate safety features due to the cost and effort associated with rework.

This paper presents a case study from the Kiribati Road Rehabilitation Project which provided an ideal scenario to prove the concept given the large number of vulnerable users and historically poor road safety performance. The risk to pedestrians was expected to increase as a result of the improved road condition, particularly from drunk drivers and speeding vehicles. The case study shows how improvements in road condition need not create roads which threaten the lives and wellbeing of the poorest members of society.

Adopting a comprehensive auditing approach from project initiation helped ensure that any investments incorporated safe features, effectively maximising the development impact.