



Message from Eva Molnar, Director of UNECE Sustainable Transport Division



International Level Crossing Awareness Day (ILCAD)

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Quantum change in attention to safety at road-rail level crossings!

Does road-rail level crossing remain to be a “no man’s land” or do we really have to pay more attention to these specific intersections in the context of transport safety?

UIC and the initiative ILCAD have been doing phenomenal advocacy and the situation started to turn around, though slowly. The Inland Transport Committee of UNECE and its working party called Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety (WP.1) have been contributing to the UIC and ILCAD activities and thanks to the active participation of governments and railways, have also elaborated a systemic analytical approach in this field. The paper titled “Assessment of safety at level crossings in UNECE member countries and other selected countries and strategic framework for improving safety at level crossings” brings a lot of shortcomings into the limelight and provides countries with specific recommendations as well as a comprehensive approach for achieving continuous improvement in safety performance at level crossings.

One of the most critical safety issues for road-rail level crossings, in my eyes, is that we still lack data and knowledge about the magnitude and nature of the problem. With perseverance and hard work one can produce statistics on road-rail level crossing safety in most countries of the world. However, these data are neither readily available at global, regional and sub-regional levels, nor are they collected according to an internationally agreed methodology.

How many and what kind of level crossings exist in the world broken down to different regions or to different groups of countries? How to classify them? How many accidents, fatalities, injuries happen every year? These are questions that should not pose any problem in finding the correct answers at national level, but they do at international level. UNECE and UIC jointly are able to make a change and bring road-rail level crossing safety data and statistics to the level of expectations and I do hope that by 2020 reliable data will be available in open source. I do hope that countries are going to follow on the recommendation of the earlier mentioned paper and will produce and publish a list of level crossing safety indicators stipulated there.

Why 2020? Because, it is urgent and because this is the end of the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety, by which the world is expected to halve the number of global death and injuries from road traffic accidents compared to the year of 2000 (SDG target 3.6). How would you feel if the two most relevant cooperation platforms, the Inland Transport Committee of UNECE and UIC would not be able to tell you if in the area of road-rail level crossing this target has been achieved or not. Those who lost their beloved would at least wish that their loss is taken into account not by a rough estimate.

In the short time of the next three years, however, not only data and statistics on road-rail level crossing safety must be improved, but tangible increase in the level of safety at level crossings must be targeted, too. The breathtaking new infrastructure investments throughout the world may help a bit by diverting some traffic to motorways and to high speed rails. However, motorways do not meet rail lines and high speed lines do not meet roads, but lower category roads and the rest of the rail network do. Consequently, people travelling on these roads or lines are exposed to double safety hazard: the lower safety conditions of these roads are further aggravated by level crossings. And these are the roads and lines that are often left out of the calculation. It will not be enough to allocate maintenance and rehabilitation budget to maintain the original safety level, more needs to be invested to save lives. Therefore, I hope that the continued awareness raising by ILCAD will also result in the political recognition that lower category road and rail networks warrant the necessary attention, adequate risk assessment and funding to decrease risks at these crossings if found too high. Without a quantum change in attention to safety at road-rail level crossings it will be very difficult to meet our part of the Sustainable Development Goal target and our hopes for a vision zero fatality scenario will stay unfulfilled.