

People's Participation

(*'As long as poverty, injustice & inequality exist in this world, none of us can truly rest'*)

'Baseline Report on Road Safety in West Bengal, India'

In Collaboration With:

- **Mompapa Foundation**
- **Kali Shankar Foundation**

Prepared By:

People's Participation (NGO)

Lead Researcher:

Mr. Dipankar Mitra (**ORCID ID: 0009-0000-9648-0528**)

Project Coordinator, People's Participation

Research Team:

- Ms. Samita Goswami – Research Assistant (**ORCID ID: 0009-0008-8378-7764**)
- Mr. Himanshu Das – Research Assistant
- Mr. Partha Sarathi Chakraborty – Research Assistant
- Mr. Alope Chakraborty – Research Assistant
- Mr. Biplab Hait – Research Assistant
- Ms. Shrabanti Sau – Research Assistant

Research Period:

April – June 2025

Date of Submission:

July 2025

Acknowledgement

This baseline research study titled “**Baseline Report on Road Safety in West Bengal, India**” was undertaken as a collaborative initiative of **People’s Participation**, in partnership with **Mompapa Foundation** and **Kali Shankar Foundation**.

We express our sincere gratitude to the many stakeholders who contributed to this study—particularly the general public, accident victims and their families, road users, transport workers, health professionals, traffic police, and local community representatives—for sharing their time, experiences, and perspectives. Their openness and insights have been invaluable in understanding the realities of road safety and challenges faced at the community level.

We would like to place on record our appreciation for **Mr. Dipankar Mitra**, Lead Researcher and Project Coordinator of People’s Participation, whose guidance, vision, and commitment steered this research to completion.

Our thanks also go to the dedicated research team—**Ms. Samita Goswami, Mr. Himanshu Das, Mr. Partha Sarathi Chakraborty, Mr. Alope Chakraborty, Mr. Biplab Hait, and Ms. Shrabanti Sau**—for their hard work in conducting field surveys, interviews, data analysis, and documentation.

We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of local hospitals, traffic authorities, and community organizations that supported the fieldwork and provided critical inputs to this study.

This report is dedicated to all those who have lost their lives or livelihoods due to road accidents and to the countless families who continue to bear the social and economic burden of unsafe roads. It is our hope that this research will contribute toward building safer roads, stronger policies, and a culture of responsibility for every road user in West Bengal and across India.

—**The Research Team**

July 2025

Declaration

I hereby declare that the research study titled “*Baseline Report on Road Safety in West Bengal, India*” has been conducted ethically and independently by the research team under my supervision. The findings presented in this report are based on primary fieldwork, interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of relevant secondary sources.

All necessary precautions were taken to ensure voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for the dignity of respondents throughout the research process.

This report is an original work and has not been submitted to any other institution or organization for academic, research, or official purposes.

Lead Researcher

Mr. Dipankar Mitra
Project Leader
People’s Participation
Kolkata, West Bengal

Date: July 2025

Research Ethics Statement

The study titled “*Baseline Report on Road Safety in West Bengal, India*” was conducted in full compliance with established ethical research principles. The research team ensured that:

- **Informed Consent:** All participants provided informed consent prior to interviews and discussions. The purpose of the study, intended use of data, and participants’ rights were clearly explained in simple, local language.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents retained the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequence or pressure.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** All respondents were assured of confidentiality, and no personal identifiers (such as names or addresses) have been published or disclosed in this report.
- **Respectful Engagement:** Interviews and interactions were conducted in a respectful, non-intrusive manner, ensuring that respondents were not subjected to any physical, psychological, or emotional harm.
- **Data Usage and Security:** Data collected during the fieldwork has been used exclusively for research purposes and stored securely to maintain integrity and confidentiality.
- **No Coercion or Inducement:** No financial inducement, coercion, or undue influence was used to secure participation.

This study complies with standard **social research ethics** and was carried out with sensitivity to the socio-economic vulnerabilities of the respondent groups.

Lead Researcher

Mr. Dipankar Mitra
Project Coordinator
People’s Participation
Date: July 2025

Abbreviations and Glossary

Abbreviations:

- **NGO** – Non-Governmental Organization
- **ISI** – Indian Standards Institute (certification mark for safety products, including helmets)
- **DUI** – Driving Under the Influence (alcohol or substances)
- **FIR** – First Information Report (official police report after a complaint/accident in India)
- **CCTV** – Closed Circuit Television (used for monitoring and enforcement)
- **DLSA** – District Legal Services Authority
- **SLSA** – State Legal Services Authority
- **UNRSC** – United Nations Road Safety Collaboration (reference framework for global road safety)
- **MoRTH** – Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Government of India
- **WHO** – World Health Organization
- **GRSP** – Global Road Safety Partnership

🔍 Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Good Samaritan Law:** Legal protection in India that shields bystanders from harassment or liability when they help accident victims.
- **Helmet Certification (ISI Mark):** Mandatory Indian safety standard ensuring helmets meet protective requirements; uncertified helmets provide inadequate protection.
- **Driver Union:** Organized associations of vehicle drivers (auto, taxi, truck, bus) that are often politically influenced and impact enforcement/training practices.
- **Civic Police:** Auxiliary or municipal police personnel recruited to support traffic and law enforcement duties; often undertrained in road safety management.
- **Traffic Corruption:** Practices where traffic enforcement is weakened by bribery, favoritism, or political influence, undermining safety.
- **Post-Accident Care:** Immediate medical and administrative response following road crashes; delayed by fear of police harassment or bureaucratic hurdles.
- **Revenue-Driven Governance:** A governance issue where state authorities prioritize vehicle-related income (taxes, tolls, fines) over strict enforcement of safety regulations.
- **Road Safety Awareness:** Structured education and campaigns aimed at building knowledge, attitudes, and practices for safe road use, starting from schools and communities.

- **Vehicle Fitness Certificate:** A government-mandated document certifying that a vehicle is roadworthy; corruption and weak enforcement often make this ineffective.
 - **Baseline Study:** Initial research used to understand existing conditions (in this case, road safety practices, governance, and awareness) to inform interventions and future programs.
-
-
-

1. Background and Rationale

Road traffic accidents constitute a major public health challenge in India, particularly in West Bengal, where increasing urbanization, vehicle ownership, and road congestion contribute to a rising incidence of injuries and fatalities. Despite the presence of traffic laws and regulations, enforcement is often inconsistent, and systemic gaps persist.

Road safety is a multidimensional issue encompassing:

- **Behavioral factors:** Unsafe driving, non-use of helmets, alcohol/substance abuse, poor vehicle maintenance.
- **Institutional factors:** Weak law enforcement, corrupt practices, politically influenced driver unions.
- **Governance factors:** Revenue-driven priorities overshadowing safety, lack of accountability.
- **Educational factors:** Absence of structured road safety awareness in schools and communities.
- **Medical and post-accident factors:** Limited emergency care access and fear of harassment by authorities.

People's Participation (NGO) seeks to establish a **comprehensive baseline** to inform interventions, advocacy, and community programs aimed at improving road safety, reducing accidents, and promoting civic responsibility.

2. Objectives of the Baseline Study

1. To assess current road safety practices among drivers, riders, and pedestrians.
2. To identify systemic gaps in licensing, enforcement, and governance.
3. To evaluate behavioral factors contributing to accidents.
4. To determine community awareness of traffic rules and safety measures.
5. To document post-accident care and emergency response challenges.
6. To inform targeted interventions, advocacy programs, and policy recommendations.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection Approach

The baseline assessment employed a **mixed-method approach**:

- **Quantitative Data:** Surveys and structured questionnaires administered to:
 - Drivers of two-wheelers, cars, and commercial vehicles
 - Pedestrians and bystanders
 - Families of accident victims
- **Qualitative Data:** Key informant interviews and focus group discussions with:
 - Traffic police and civic authorities
 - Driver unions
 - NGOs and community leaders

3.2 Sampling Strategy

- Multi-stage sampling covering urban, semi-urban, and rural areas in West Bengal.
- Target respondents included approximately 500–1000 drivers, riders, and community members.
- Random selection ensured representative data across different socioeconomic and geographic groups.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

- Structured baseline questionnaire covering:
 - Driver/rider behavior
 - Awareness of traffic laws
 - Vehicle maintenance practices
 - Experiences with accidents and enforcement
- Observational checklists for helmet use, vehicle conditions, and traffic rule compliance.
- Interviews with civic police, hospital staff, and union representatives to assess institutional gaps.

3.4 Limitations

- Self-reporting may lead to underreporting of risky behaviors or bribery incidents.
- Observational data was limited to selected high-traffic areas.
- Political sensitivity may limit disclosure about driver unions and corruption.

4. Key Findings

4.1 Helmet Use and Safety

- Majority of riders use helmets irregularly or with poor fit.
- High-quality certified helmets are expensive and unaffordable for many.
- Cheap, non-certified helmets are widely used.
- Police enforcement focuses on usage, not helmet quality or certification.

4.2 Licensing and Traffic Enforcement

- Many drivers obtain licenses without proper training via bribery or intermediaries.
- Inconsistent enforcement and corruption reduce the deterrent effect of traffic laws.
- Low penalties allow repeated risky behaviors without fear of consequence.

4.3 Alcohol and Substance-Influenced Driving

- Driving under influence is common, especially during festivals and public holidays.
- Enforcement is sporadic; bribery often enables violators to escape penalties.

4.4 Civic Police Capacity

- Many municipal and civic police are undertrained in traffic management, road safety, and accident response.
- Limited supervision and accountability exacerbate accidents and mismanagement at crash sites.

4.5 Driver Health and Fitness

- Drivers often have poor physical fitness, delayed reflexes, or unassessed medical conditions.
- Regular vision, hearing, or medical assessments are rarely conducted.

4.6 Politically Influenced Driver Unions

- Driver unions are often controlled by political interests, limiting NGO access for safety training.
- This prevents standardized driver training programs and perpetuates unsafe practices.

4.7 Vehicle Maintenance

- Vehicles are poorly maintained; brakes, tires, and suspension systems often neglected.
- Mechanical failures contribute significantly to accidents.

4.8 Road Safety Awareness

- Road safety education is largely absent in schools and households.
- Unsafe practices learned in childhood persist into adulthood.

4.9 Post-Accident Care

- Fear of police harassment delays hospital admission of victims.
- Delays in emergency care increase injury severity and preventable deaths.

4.10 Government Revenue Dependence

- Vehicle registration, tolls, and fines are major revenue sources.
- Dependence on revenue reduces strict enforcement and leniency toward drivers.
- Systemic conflict of interest affects penalties, inspections, and post-accident interventions.

5. Analysis of Findings

- Unsafe driver behavior, poor enforcement, and systemic corruption are interlinked.
- Behavioral risks, such as non-standard helmet use and intoxicated driving, are reinforced by weak accountability.
- Political influence in driver unions and revenue-driven government policies hinder road safety initiatives.
- Lack of awareness, insufficient training, and poor medical checks increase vulnerability of both drivers and pedestrians.
- Delays in post-accident care and fear of harassment worsen outcomes for victims.

6. Baseline Conclusion

The baseline assessment indicates that road safety in West Bengal is **critically compromised** due to:

- Behavioral negligence: reckless driving, alcohol use, poor helmet adherence.
- Systemic corruption: bribery in licensing, enforcement, and post-accident processes.
- Weak governance: revenue-driven priorities, political influence, undertrained police.
- Infrastructure gaps: poorly maintained vehicles, lack of early road safety education.
- Health and emergency gaps: unfit drivers, delayed post-accident care.

This baseline provides a foundation for targeted interventions by People's Participation, aiming to:

- Improve enforcement and accountability
- Promote helmet use and safe driving behaviors
- Conduct structured driver training and public awareness programs
- Strengthen post-accident response and emergency care access
- Advocate for systemic reforms in governance, licensing, and union policies

7. Recommendations

1. **Helmet Safety:** Promote certified, affordable helmets with proper fit; enforce quality checks.
2. **Licensing and Enforcement:** Ensure transparent, standardized testing; digitalize licensing; strengthen penalties.
3. **Alcohol and Substance Control:** Conduct random checks; increase penalties; promote alternatives.
4. **Civic Police Training:** Mandatory certified road safety training; refresher courses; accountability measures.
5. **Driver Health:** Mandatory vision, hearing, and medical checks; periodic fitness assessments.
6. **Driver Unions:** Reduce political interference; allow independent training programs.
7. **Vehicle Maintenance:** Mandatory periodic inspections linked to registration and insurance.
8. **Road Safety Education:** Integrate into school curricula; community awareness programs for families.
9. **Post-Accident Care:** Implement Good Samaritan protections; streamline hospital admissions; train police.
10. **Governance Reforms:** Separate revenue from enforcement; transparent reporting; ensure impartiality in penalties.

○ Helmet Safety: Promote affordable, certified helmets; enforce quality checks.

1. Helmet Fit and Comfort

- Many riders report that helmets feel uneasy or do not fit properly.
- Ill-fitting helmets reduce safety because they may shift or come off during an accident.
- Factors contributing to poor fit: head shape differences, generic sizing, and lack of awareness about proper helmet adjustment.

2. Cost vs Quality

- High-quality, branded helmets are expensive, often beyond the reach of middle- and lower-income riders.
- Cheap helmets are widely available but often lack proper safety certification or adequate construction.

- Riders often choose comfort or price over safety, increasing risk.

3. Regulation and Enforcement

- The law in India mandates wearing helmets, but there is little enforcement on **helmet quality or certification**.
- Police primarily check **presence** of a helmet, not whether it meets ISI or other safety standards.
- Lack of enforcement allows substandard helmets to remain in widespread use.

4. Consequences

- Increased vulnerability to head injuries in accidents.
- High mortality and morbidity rates from road accidents involving two-wheelers.
- Public perception that helmets are “optional” or merely a legal formality rather than a safety tool.

5. Possible Solutions

- Awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of certified helmets.
- Subsidies or incentives for purchasing ISI-certified helmets.
- Better sizing and design to accommodate diverse head shapes comfortably.
- Policy and enforcement reforms: Police should check for certified helmets, not just usage.
- Collaboration with manufacturers to produce affordable, safe, and comfortable helmets.

○ Traffic Corruption and Road Safety Risks in India

Problem Overview

1. Bribery in Traffic Enforcement

- Many traffic police officers reportedly accept bribes from violators, undermining the law.
- Minor traffic violations—like not wearing helmets, over speeding, or running red lights—are often overlooked in exchange for cash.

2. Low Perceived Risk

- Drivers and riders perceive that penalties are avoidable.
- This encourages reckless driving, speeding, and violation of road safety rules.

3. Aggressive Driving Behavior

- Some motorists become overconfident and drive aggressively, knowing the chance of punishment is low.
- Road rage incidents increase due to reckless and unsafe driving habits.

Consequences

- High incidence of road accidents, injuries, and fatalities.
- Traffic rules lose credibility; law-abiding citizens are penalized unfairly.
- Bribery and corruption foster a culture of impunity and unsafe driving practices.

Possible Solutions

1. **Strengthen Accountability**
 - Introduce body cameras or dashcams for traffic police during duty.
 - Periodic audits and anonymous reporting mechanisms for bribery.
2. **Automated Enforcement**
 - Use speed cameras, red-light cameras, and automated penalty systems to reduce reliance on manual enforcement.
 - Digital payment for fines to reduce opportunities for cash bribes.
3. **Awareness and Penalty Reform**
 - Conduct campaigns highlighting consequences of reckless driving.
 - Ensure consistent and transparent penalties for violations.
4. **Community Engagement**
 - Encourage citizen reporting of violations and corruption through helplines or apps.
 - NGOs can work with local authorities to monitor traffic enforcement and public safety initiatives.

○ Corruption in Driving License Issuance and Renewal

Problem Overview

1. **Illegal or Bribed Licenses**
 - Many drivers obtain driving licenses without proper training or tests by paying bribes to officials or through intermediaries.
 - Renewal of licenses is often done similarly, bypassing mandatory re-testing or verification.
2. **Unqualified Drivers on Roads**
 - Drivers without proper training lack knowledge of traffic rules, road signs, and safe driving practices.
 - This increases the likelihood of accidents, reckless driving, and inability to respond to emergencies.
3. **Systemic Weakness**
 - Corruption at licensing authorities reduces accountability.
 - It undermines the legitimacy of the licensing system and public trust in traffic regulations.

Consequences

- Higher incidence of road accidents due to untrained and unqualified drivers.
- Unsafe driving practices such as over speeding, aggressive overtaking, and poor compliance with helmet and seatbelt laws.
- Difficulty enforcing road safety rules because many drivers are effectively operating outside legal standards.
- Bribery networks thrive, reinforcing a culture of impunity and systemic corruption.

Possible Solutions

1. **Strengthen Licensing Systems**
 - Digitalize licensing procedures with secure, tamper-proof verification.
 - Mandatory practical and theoretical tests with transparent monitoring, including CCTV surveillance.
 - Limit involvement of intermediaries; encourage applicants to follow official channels.
2. **Reduce Bribery**
 - Implement online payments for license fees to reduce cash transactions.
 - Set up anonymous reporting channels for bribery or corruption in licensing offices.
 - Conduct regular audits and accountability reviews of licensing authorities.
3. **Public Awareness**
 - Educate citizens on the risks of obtaining licenses through illegal channels.
 - Promote safe driving courses and certification programs recognized by authorities.

○ Alcohol, Substance Abuse, and Road Accidents in India

Problem Overview

1. **Driving Under the Influence**
 - Many drivers and riders consume alcohol or other intoxicants during festivals, celebrations, or daily life.
 - Impaired judgment, slowed reflexes, and overconfidence increase accident risk.
2. **Addiction and Recklessness**
 - Habitual alcohol or substance abuse can make drivers more aggressive, inattentive, and prone to risky behaviors.
 - Combined with unsafe helmets, unqualified drivers, or weak enforcement, the risks are amplified.
3. **Low Perceived Risk**
 - Corruption in traffic enforcement allows intoxicated drivers to avoid penalties by bribing officials.
 - Many believe they can escape legal consequences, which encourages repeated offenses.

Consequences

- High rates of fatalities and serious injuries, especially during festive periods.

- Increased road rage and aggressive driving behaviors.
- Strain on emergency and healthcare services.
- Reduced public trust in traffic laws due to weak enforcement.

Possible Solutions

1. **Strict Enforcement of DUI Laws**
 - Random breathalyzer tests, especially during festivals and peak traffic hours.
 - Mandatory penalties and jail time for drunk or intoxicated driving.
2. **Public Awareness Campaigns**
 - Educate citizens about the dangers of drinking and driving.
 - Promote alternative transport options (cabs, public transport, ride-sharing) during festivals.
3. **Integrated Approach**
 - Combine DUI enforcement with helmet checks, licensing audits, and traffic law enforcement.
 - Engage NGOs, community groups, and local authorities to run awareness programs before major festive periods.

○ Weak Punishments and Corruption in Road Accidents

Problem Overview

1. **Lenient Legal Penalties**
 - Traffic rules violations and even road accidents often result in minimal fines or minor administrative action.
 - Serious consequences like jail time, license suspension, or heavy fines are rarely imposed unless there is extreme public or media attention.
2. **Bribery Opportunities**
 - Many cases, especially in the initial stage of an accident, can be “managed” through bribes to police or authorities.
 - Drivers and riders often offer money to avoid FIRs, liability, or legal action.
 - Insurance and legal processes are sometimes bypassed due to corruption.
3. **Low Fear of Punishment**
 - Knowing that rules can be circumvented, drivers/riders feel emboldened to violate traffic laws.
 - This encourages reckless driving, over speeding, poor helmet use, and ignoring safety norms.

Consequences

- Higher rates of road fatalities and injuries.
- Unsafe driving becomes normalized; law-abiding drivers are at higher risk.
- Corruption in handling accidents undermines public trust in traffic management and justice.
- Insurance and medical systems become stressed due to unreported or mismanaged accidents.

Possible Solutions

1. **Strengthen Legal Penalties**
 - Increase fines, license suspensions, and jail terms for serious traffic violations and accidents.
 - Make penalties proportionate to the severity of harm caused (injury/fatality).
2. **Reduce Bribery Opportunities**
 - Ensure proper documentation, CCTV, and digital evidence collection at accident sites.
 - Implement stricter supervision and accountability for traffic police handling accidents.
 - Encourage public reporting of bribery or manipulation in accident cases.
3. **Public Awareness and Accountability**
 - Run campaigns showing real consequences of accidents and traffic violations.
 - Promote civic responsibility and safe driving culture.

○ Impact of Undertrained Civic Police on Road Safety in West Bengal

Problem Overview

1. **Civic Police Recruitment**
 - Many civic/municipal police personnel recruited for traffic and road safety duties lack formal police or traffic training.
 - They are often tasked with managing traffic, enforcing road laws, and handling accidents without adequate preparation.
2. **Lack of Training and Experience**
 - Limited knowledge of traffic rules, accident management, and road safety protocols.
 - Poor ability to identify violations, assess accidents, or implement preventive measures.
 - Inexperience contributes to errors in handling traffic flow, collisions, and emergency response.
3. **Consequences**
 - Daily road accidents increase due to mismanagement or ineffective enforcement.
 - Improper guidance and control at accident or congested sites exacerbate risks.
 - Public trust in traffic management declines; reckless drivers exploit weak oversight.
 - Lack of accountability and formal training reduces effectiveness in preventing road crashes.

Possible Solutions

1. **Professional Training**
 - Mandatory, certified training for civic police on traffic management, road safety laws, and accident response.
 - Regular refresher courses to keep officers updated with new regulations and safety practices.
2. **Supervision and Mentorship**
 - Pair undertrained civic police with experienced traffic officers for mentoring.

- Implement supervisory mechanisms to ensure proper enforcement and accident management.
- 3. **Digital and Automated Support**
 - Use traffic cameras, speed sensors, and automated enforcement to support undertrained personnel.
 - Provide mobile apps or decision-support tools for quick guidance in accident or violation situations.
- 4. **Awareness Campaigns**
 - Educate civic police on the risks of improper enforcement and encourage a culture of accountability.

○ Impact of Physical and Medical Unfitness on Road Safety

Problem Overview

1. **Lack of Physical Fitness**
 - Drivers and riders who are physically unfit (poor stamina, slow reflexes, fatigue) are more likely to cause accidents.
 - Heavy workloads, long driving hours, or age-related decline reduce reaction time and alertness.
2. **Lack of Counseling or Awareness**
 - Drivers rarely receive guidance on safe driving practices, stress management, or handling aggressive road behavior.
 - Poor mental preparedness leads to rash decisions and risky driving.
3. **Medical Oversight Deficiency**
 - Eye tests and other medical fitness checks are often not mandatory or poorly enforced.
 - Poor vision, hearing, or undiagnosed health conditions (like hypertension or diabetes) increase accident risk.
 - Drivers with medical conditions may not be aware of their limitations.

Consequences

- Increased road accidents caused by delayed reactions, poor judgment, or inability to handle emergencies.
- Higher incidence of fatal and serious injuries, especially for two-wheeler riders.
- Weakening of overall traffic safety, particularly when combined with other systemic issues (untrained police, corrupt licensing, alcohol use).

Possible Solutions

1. **Mandatory Physical and Medical Fitness Tests**
 - Require regular physical exams and eye/vision tests for license issuance and renewal.
 - Include mental health or counseling sessions to assess stress tolerance and decision-making.

2. **Driver Awareness Programs**
 - Conduct workshops on safe driving, physical and mental fitness, and handling fatigue.
 - Promote healthy lifestyle awareness among drivers/riders.
3. **Policy Integration**
 - Make medical certification a mandatory part of digitalized licensing systems.
 - Periodic re-assessment for professional drivers and high-risk categories.

○ Impact of Politically Influenced Driver Associations on Road Safety

Problem Overview

1. **Politicized Leadership**
 - Many car, taxi, or truck driver unions and associations are led or influenced by local politicians.
 - Leadership often prioritizes political or financial interests over safety and training.
2. **Resistance to External Training**
 - NGOs, activist trainers, or road safety educators are generally not allowed to train drivers under these unions.
 - Safety campaigns, awareness workshops, or skill development initiatives are blocked or ignored.
3. **Consequences**
 - Drivers remain untrained in safe driving practices, accident prevention, and traffic rules.
 - Unsafe driving behaviors are perpetuated within the union.
 - Road safety interventions at the community level are limited, reducing the impact of government or NGO programs.
 - Politically protected drivers may also exploit lenient enforcement and bribery systems.

Possible Solutions

1. **Policy and Advocacy Engagement**
 - Work with traffic authorities to create mandatory, union-independent driver training programs.
 - Lobby for regulations requiring proof of driver training and certification regardless of union membership.
2. **Community and NGO Partnerships**
 - Conduct training sessions at neutral venues outside union control.
 - Partner with municipal authorities, transport departments, or insurance companies to enforce compliance.
3. **Awareness and Incentives**
 - Promote campaigns highlighting benefits of safe driving, such as insurance discounts or rewards for certified drivers.
 - Recognize and reward drivers who voluntarily undergo professional training.

○ Impact of Poor Vehicle Maintenance on Road Safety

Problem Overview

1. Neglect of Vehicle Maintenance

- Many cars and bikes are not regularly inspected for safety-critical components such as brakes, tires, lights, and suspension.
- Drivers or vehicle owners often skip routine servicing due to cost, inconvenience, or lack of awareness.

2. Safety Risks

- Worn-out tires reduce traction, especially in wet conditions, leading to skidding and collisions.
- Faulty brakes increase stopping distance, causing accidents at intersections or sudden stops.
- Poorly maintained lights, mirrors, or suspension systems compromise overall vehicle control and visibility.

3. Contributing Factors

- Weak enforcement of vehicle fitness checks by traffic authorities.
- Corruption or lack of transparency in vehicle inspection and roadworthiness certification.
- Drivers and owners often rely on informal repairs without professional evaluation.

Consequences

- Increased risk of road accidents caused by mechanical failures.
- Greater severity of accidents due to inability to control vehicles effectively.
- Reduced effectiveness of safety campaigns, helmets, and other protective measures when vehicles themselves are unsafe.
- Overburdened emergency and healthcare systems due to preventable accidents.

Possible Solutions

1. Mandatory Vehicle Fitness Checks

- Require annual or semi-annual inspections for brakes, tires, lights, and other critical systems.
- Tie registration renewal and insurance validity to verified fitness certificates.

2. Awareness Campaigns for Vehicle Owners

- Educate drivers on the importance of regular servicing and maintenance for road safety.
- Promote low-cost, certified service options to encourage compliance.

3. Digital and Enforcement Measures

- Introduce digital records of vehicle fitness to prevent corruption and ensure compliance.
- Empower traffic police to enforce routine spot checks of vehicle safety components.

○ Impact of Lack of Road Safety Education from Childhood

Problem Overview

1. No Early Education on Road Safety

- Children are rarely taught road safety rules at home or in school.
 - Skills such as crossing the road safely, understanding pedestrian signals, and observing traffic flow are not systematically taught.
2. **Limited Awareness of Traffic Systems**
- Children and adolescents often lack knowledge about traffic rules, signals, and safe road behavior.
 - Misconceptions or ignorance lead to risky behavior like running across roads, jaywalking, or ignoring signals.
3. **Cultural and Social Neglect**
- Guardians, teachers, and communities rarely emphasize road safety as a critical life skill.
 - Absence of structured education programs means unsafe habits carry into adulthood.

Consequences

- Increased pedestrian accidents, especially among children and adolescents.
- Unsafe road behavior normalized from a young age, contributing to adult recklessness.
- Difficulty in implementing road safety campaigns for adults who have never learned basic safety.
- Higher burden on traffic enforcement and emergency services due to preventable accidents.

Possible Solutions

1. **Integration into School Curriculum**
- Introduce road safety education as part of early school curricula.
 - Teach children safe crossing, understanding signals, helmet use, and awareness of vehicle movement.
2. **Community Awareness Programs**
- Conduct workshops, street plays, and interactive sessions on road safety for children and guardians.
 - Engage NGOs, local authorities, and police to demonstrate safe practices.
3. **Public Campaigns**
- Use media, posters, and digital platforms to reinforce road safety from childhood.
 - Encourage parents to model safe road behavior for their children.

○ Impact of Police Harassment on Post-Accident Care

Problem Overview

1. **Fear of Police Harassment**
- After a road accident, bystanders and family members often hesitate to take victims to hospitals due to anticipated police interrogation, harassment, or bureaucratic hurdles.
 - Police may unnecessarily detain or question drivers, owners, or witnesses, creating fear among the public.

2. Delayed Medical Attention

- Fear of police intervention causes delays in admitting victims to hospitals.
- Timely first aid, trauma care, or emergency surgery may be missed, increasing the risk of permanent injury or death.

3. Psychological and Social Barriers

- Victims and families may avoid reporting accidents to police entirely, fearing prolonged investigations or demands for bribes.
- Community trust in traffic authorities declines, undermining road safety systems.

Consequences

- Increased fatalities and severity of injuries due to delayed medical intervention.
- Underreporting of accidents, weakening data for policymaking and safety campaigns.
- Psychological trauma for victims and families, compounded by fear of harassment.
- Erosion of public trust in police and emergency response systems.

Possible Solutions

1. “Good Samaritan” Protection Laws

- Ensure strict enforcement of existing laws that protect bystanders who help accident victims.
- Guarantee immunity from harassment, questioning, or liability for first responders.

2. Emergency Medical Access

- Mandate hospitals to admit accident victims immediately without requiring police clearance.
- Train police officers to prioritize victim care over bureaucratic formalities at accident sites.

3. Awareness Campaigns

- Educate citizens about legal protections and rights under Good Samaritan laws.
- Promote a culture of helping accident victims without fear of legal consequences.

4. Police Accountability

- Sensitize traffic and local police on post-accident protocols emphasizing victim safety and timely medical care.
- Monitor police compliance through audits, citizen feedback, and NGO engagement.

○ Impact of Government Revenue Dependence on Road Safety Enforcement

Problem Overview

1. Revenue from Vehicles

- Governments collect large sums from vehicle registration, road taxes, tolls, and fines.

- This creates a financial incentive to prioritize vehicle usage and ownership over strict enforcement.
- 2. **Leniency Towards Drivers**
 - Authorities may be less strict in penalizing law-breaking drivers or enforcing vehicle fitness checks.
 - Drivers and vehicle owners sometimes receive indirect support or leniency, even after accidents.
- 3. **Conflict of Interest**
 - Road safety enforcement may take a back seat to revenue generation goals.
 - Policies may favor motorized transport expansion rather than public safety.

Consequences

- Increased road accidents due to weak enforcement of traffic laws.
- Public perception of bias, eroding trust in government and traffic authorities.
- Unsafe driving behavior is tolerated, as drivers expect minimal consequences.
- Road safety campaigns and regulatory interventions are less effective.

Possible Solutions

1. **Separate Revenue and Safety Enforcement**
 - Ensure that road safety departments are financially independent of vehicle-related revenue streams.
 - Allocate fines and penalties specifically to road safety improvement and public awareness programs.
2. **Transparency and Accountability**
 - Publish accident statistics, enforcement records, and revenue allocations to ensure public accountability.
 - Engage independent NGOs or citizen committees to monitor enforcement impartiality.
3. **Policy Alignment**
 - Align vehicle taxation and infrastructure policies with safety outcomes rather than just revenue generation.
 - Incentivize safer vehicles, regular maintenance, and adherence to traffic rules.

Baseline Questionnaire: Road Safety Assessment

Section 1: General Information

1. Name (optional): _____
2. Age: _____
3. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
4. Occupation: _____

5. Area of residence: _____

Section 2: Driving/Riding Behavior

1. Do you currently drive or ride a two-wheeler/car? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. How did you obtain your driving license?
☐ Official training and test
☐ Through intermediaries/bribes
☐ Don't know/Other
3. How often do you wear a helmet or seatbelt?
☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never
4. Have you ever driven under the influence of alcohol or substances?
☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Do you regularly maintain your vehicle (brakes, tires, lights, suspension)?
☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

Section 3: Awareness and Education

1. Were you taught road safety rules at school or by guardians? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Are you aware of traffic rules like lane discipline, signals, and speed limits?
☐ Fully aware ☐ Partially aware ☐ Not aware
3. Have you ever received formal road safety training? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 4: Experience with Accidents

1. Have you been involved in a road accident? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. If yes, did you receive medical care immediately? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Did fear of police harassment affect the decision to take the victim to the hospital? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Were legal or administrative procedures complicated or delayed due to bribery or corruption? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 5: Perception of Enforcement

1. Do you think traffic rules are enforced effectively in your area? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Have you witnessed bribery or leniency in traffic rule enforcement? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Do you feel penalties for traffic violations are sufficient to deter risky behavior? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 6: Opinion on Government and Systemic Issues

1. Do you feel the government prioritizes revenue from vehicles over road safety? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Are drivers' unions politically influenced in your area? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
3. Do you think civic/municipal police are trained enough for road safety management? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 7: Suggestions

1. What measures would you suggest to improve road safety?

2. What support or awareness would help you drive/ride safely?

This questionnaire covers:

- **Driver/rider behavior and compliance**
- **Awareness and education levels**
- **Vehicle maintenance practices**
- **Post-accident care experiences**
- **Perceptions of enforcement, corruption, and governance**

-Advocacy Note-

Comprehensive Road Safety Strategy for West Bengal and India

Issue Overview:

Road safety in West Bengal and India is compromised by multiple, interconnected challenges, resulting in high fatalities, injuries, and unsafe road behavior. Key issues include: unsafe helmets, corrupt licensing, weak traffic enforcement, alcohol/substance-influenced driving, lenient punishments with bribery, undertrained civic police, drivers' physical and medical unfitness, politically influenced driver unions, poor vehicle maintenance, lack of early road safety education, post-accident fear preventing timely medical care, and government revenue-driven leniency toward drivers.

1. **Helmet Safety Challenges**
 - * Helmets often do not fit properly, causing discomfort and reducing protection.
 - * High-quality, ISI-certified helmets are expensive; cheap, non-certified helmets dominate the market.
 - * Police enforcement generally checks only for helmet use, not certification or quality.
2. **Corruption in Driving License Issuance**
 - * Many drivers obtain licenses without proper training or testing via bribes or intermediaries.
 - * Renewal processes are similarly compromised, allowing unqualified drivers on roads.
3. **Weak Traffic Law Enforcement**
 - * Some traffic police accept bribes, reducing the deterrent effect of traffic laws.
 - * Drivers perceive low risk of penalties, encouraging over speeding, reckless driving, and road rage.
4. **Alcohol and Substance-Related Accidents**

- * Drivers frequently consume alcohol or other intoxicants, especially during festivals or celebrations.
- * Impaired judgment and slowed reflexes increase accident risk.
- * Weak enforcement and bribery allow intoxicated drivers to evade penalties.

5. Lenient Punishments and Bribery in Accidents

- * Traffic violations and accident-related offenses often result in minimal fines or minor administrative action.
- * Bribes at the initial stage of an accident allow drivers/riders to escape legal consequences.
- * Low fear of punishment encourages continued reckless and unsafe driving.

6. Undertrained Civic Police in West Bengal

- * Many civic/municipal police personnel lack formal training in policing or road safety.
- * Limited knowledge of traffic rules, accident management, and preventive measures leads to daily accidents.
- * Mismanagement at accident sites and congestion points exacerbates risks.

7. Drivers' Physical and Medical Unfitness

- * Drivers and riders often have poor physical fitness, slow reflexes, or fatigue.
- * Lack of mandatory medical, vision, and counseling checks reduces preparedness for safe driving.
- * Health issues like poor vision, hearing loss, or chronic conditions increase accident risk.

8. Politically Influenced Driver Unions

- * Many car, taxi, or truck driver unions are led or controlled by politicians.
- * These unions often block NGOs or activist trainers from conducting road safety training.
- * Drivers remain untrained, unsafe practices continue, and union politics protect members from enforcement.

9. Poor Vehicle Maintenance

- * Cars and bikes are often not regularly checked for critical components like brakes, tires, lights, or suspension.
- * Drivers/owners neglect routine servicing due to cost, inconvenience, or lack of awareness.
- * Mechanical failures increase the risk and severity of accidents.

10. Lack of Early Road Safety Education

- * Children rarely receive guidance from schools or guardians on safe road behavior.
- * Skills such as crossing the road safely, understanding traffic signals, and observing traffic are not systematically taught.
- * Absence of structured education leads to risky habits that persist into adulthood.

11. Post-Accident Fear and Barriers to Medical Care

- * Bystanders and family members often hesitate to take victims to hospitals due to fear of police harassment.
- * Delays in admitting accident victims increase risk of permanent injury or death.
- * Underreporting of accidents weakens policymaking and reduces trust in authorities.

12. Government Revenue Dependence and Leniency

- * Governments earn substantial revenue from vehicle registration, taxes, tolls, and fines.

- * Financial dependence on vehicle-related income reduces incentives to strictly enforce traffic laws.
- * Authorities may show leniency toward drivers in accidents or law-breaking to maintain revenue streams.
- * This creates a systemic conflict of interest, weakening road safety enforcement.

Consequences

- ⊗ Increased fatalities and serious injuries, especially among two-wheeler riders and pedestrians.
- ⊗ Unsafe driving and pedestrian behaviors perpetuated due to untrained drivers, poor vehicle maintenance, weak enforcement, and political or systemic leniency.
- ⊗ Delayed medical care worsens injury outcomes and increases preventable deaths.
- ⊗ Public trust in traffic laws, police, and authorities declines.
- ⊗ Road safety campaigns and interventions have limited impact due to systemic issues, political barriers, and cultural neglect.

Recommendations

1. Helmet Safety Reforms-

- Mandate checks for ISI-certified helmets during traffic enforcement.
- Promote affordable, certified helmets through subsidies or incentives.
- Collaborate with manufacturers to produce helmets that are comfortable, properly sized, and safe.
- Conduct awareness campaigns on proper helmet fit and certification importance.

2. Strengthening Licensing Systems-

- Digitalize license issuance and renewal with secure, tamper-proof verification.
- Enforce mandatory theoretical and practical driving tests with transparent monitoring.
- Reduce involvement of intermediaries; encourage applicants to follow official channels.
- Establish anonymous reporting and periodic audits to curb bribery.

3. Strengthening Traffic Enforcement-

- Introduce body cameras or digital monitoring for traffic police to reduce bribery.
- Implement automated enforcement systems (speed/red-light cameras) with digital fines.
- Ensure consistent, transparent penalties to strengthen deterrence.
- Engage NGOs and citizen groups to monitor enforcement and advocate for road safety.

4. Alcohol and Substance Use Control-

- Conduct random breathalyzer tests, especially during festivals and peak traffic times.
- Impose strict penalties for intoxicated driving, including jail time where necessary.
- Promote awareness campaigns highlighting the dangers of drunk and substance-influenced driving.
- Encourage alternative transport options (cabs, public transport, ride-sharing) during high-risk periods.

5. Strengthening Punishment and Accountability-

- Increase fines, license suspensions, and jail terms for serious traffic violations and accidents.
- Implement strict procedures to document accidents, collect evidence, and prevent bribery.
- Encourage public reporting of bribery or manipulation in accident cases.

6. Training and Capacity Building for Civic Police-

- Mandatory certified training for all civic/municipal police handling traffic duties.
- Regular refresher courses on traffic rules, accident management, and road safety best practices.
- Supervision and mentorship by experienced traffic officers.
- Digital tools and automated systems to support undertrained personnel.
- Awareness programs emphasizing accountability and professionalism.

7. Ensuring Physical and Medical Fitness of Drivers-

- Require regular medical and vision tests for license issuance and renewal.
- Include counseling and awareness sessions for stress management and safe driving practices.
- Periodic re-assessment for professional drivers and high-risk categories.
- Promote lifestyle awareness to enhance reflexes, stamina, and mental preparedness.

8. Addressing Politically Influenced Driver Unions-

- Establish mandatory, union-independent driver training programs through authorities.
- Conduct training in neutral venues, outside union control.
- Provide incentives for drivers to voluntarily undergo professional training.
- Engage transport authorities, insurance companies, and NGOs to enforce compliance regardless of union politics.

9. Ensuring Regular Vehicle Maintenance-

- Mandatory periodic vehicle fitness inspections for brakes, tires, lights, and suspension.
- Tie registration renewal and insurance validity to verified vehicle fitness certificates.
- Educate drivers and owners on the importance of routine maintenance for safety.
- Encourage low-cost certified service options and digital maintenance records to reduce corruption.

10. Integrating Road Safety Education from Childhood-

- Introduce road safety modules into early school curricula.
- Teach children safe crossing, understanding signals, helmet use, and awareness of vehicles.
- Conduct community workshops, street plays, and interactive sessions for children and guardians.
- Promote parental modeling of safe road behavior.

11. Ensuring Safe Post-Accident Care-

- Enforce Good Samaritan protection laws for bystanders helping accident victims.
- Mandate hospitals to admit accident victims immediately without requiring police clearance.
- Train police to prioritize victim care over bureaucratic procedures at accident sites.
- Conduct public awareness campaigns on rights and protections under Good Samaritan laws.
- Monitor police compliance through audits and NGO engagement.

12. Addressing Government Revenue-Related Conflicts-

- Separate road safety enforcement funding from vehicle-related revenue.
- Allocate fines and penalties specifically to road safety improvement and public awareness programs.
- Increase transparency in enforcement, accident reporting, and revenue allocation.
- Align transport and taxation policies with safety outcomes, not just revenue generation.

Conclusion:

Road safety in West Bengal and India requires a holistic, multi-layered approach:

- Safe, affordable helmets
- Transparent and rigorous licensing
- Effective, accountable traffic enforcement
- Prevention of alcohol/substance-influenced driving
- Adequate punishments with minimal opportunity for bribery
- Professional, trained civic police managing traffic
- Drivers' physical and medical fitness
- Neutral, effective driver training unaffected by politically influenced unions
- Regular vehicle maintenance to ensure roadworthiness
- Road safety education from childhood to instill lifelong safe habits
- Timely post-accident cares free from harassment
- Transparent policies minimizing revenue-driven leniency

Collaboration among authorities, NGOs, manufacturers, schools, hospitals, and communities can reduce fatalities, prevent injuries, and create safer roads for all citizens.

Bibliography

1. Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Government of India. (2023). *Road Accidents in India – 2022*. New Delhi: MoRTH.

2. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). (2023). *Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India 2022*. New Delhi: NCRB.
3. World Health Organization. (2018). *Global Status Report on Road Safety 2018*. Geneva: WHO.
4. Asian Development Bank. (2019). *Road Safety in South Asia: Strategies and Challenges*. Manila: ADB.
5. Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur – Transportation Research and Injury Prevention Programme. (2021). *Road Safety Studies in West Bengal*. Kolkata: IIT Kharagpur.
6. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India. (2020). *Emergency Medical Services in India: Policy and Implementation Report*. New Delhi: MoHFW.
7. Global Road Safety Partnership. (2020). *Road Safety Governance and Institutional Frameworks: Policy Brief*. Geneva: GRSP.
8. World Bank. (2022). *Road Safety and Injury Prevention in Developing Countries*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

XX
XX
XX