

Qatar's struggle to reduce traffic accidents

[Transportation, Road](#)



QATAR'S STRUGGLE TO REDUCE TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS Submitted To: Dr. Michael Long Date: January 25, 2006 Date: Sunday, January 25, 2006 To: Dr. Michael Long Instructor CM 2300: Report Writing Subject: Formal Report on Traffic Accidents in Qatar I am submitting the attached report, entitled Qatar's Struggle to Reduce Traffic Accidents, in accordance with the requirements for the CM2300 Report Writing course. The report covers background material concerning traffic accidents and its implications for society. Traffic accidents are considered one of the most important reasons of death in the Gulf. This paper examines possible practical approaches Qatar may consider, or is considering, in efforts to reduce the increasing number of traffic accidents. This paper discusses various aspects of public transportation problems in Doha, Qatar, and presents a proposal for reducing the risks, as well as penalizing drivers who are consistently involved in accidents. Research for this assignment was completed largely through the use of Internet where government publications and newspaper articles were easily accessible. Sincerely,

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The purpose of this report is to identify the reasons why traffic accidents are so high in this region of the world, and to determine the possible impact that they can have on society and humanity. This report discusses the causes and effects of traffic accidents in Qatar and discusses possible solutions to minimize them. After examining specific data, it is evident that traffic accidents account for the most number of deaths in Qatar. They continue to rise and pose a threat to society. In order for Qatar to reduce this menace, the following recommendations have been suggested: (1) Public education

and awareness, (2) Dedicated traffic controlling systems, (3) Penalizing drivers who are consistently involved in accidents, (4) Installation of radars throughout the major highways in Qatar, and (5) Increasing the fees on fines for breaking the traffic law

INTRODUCTION Traffic accidents are not only a serious problem in Qatar, but all over the world. Countries in the Western Europe, North America and the Middle East have acknowledged the fact that road accidents are a major cause of death and injury. While some people think that traffic accidents are not a serious problem today, consider these statistics. In 2002, while the death rate in Qatar due to cancer was only 10.6%, the mortality rate due to traffic accidents stood at a whopping 40%, according to Ministry of Public Health statistics. (Al Binali, 2004). I was shocked when I discovered that in Great Britain, over £1 billion is spent each year on a wide range of road safety measures. (Jacobs, 1986)

1. 1 THESIS STATEMENT High construction activity, poor driver education, inefficient policing, and the roundabout system are the causes of Doha's soaring accident problems. Without a proper traffic management system in place, traffic accidents will continue to rise in Qatar.

1. 2 BACKGROUND The following three sections provide background information on traffic accidents, beginning with the history of road traffic accidents and fatality rates, followed by how traffic congestion is increasing the problem.

1. 2. 1 ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS Road traffic accidents (RTAs) are increasingly being recognized as a threat to society and the people of Qatar. Qatar, which drives most of its economy on oil, has a very high amount of vehicles on its roads. Due to the construction boom, there has been a high influx of immigrants and workers, resulting in an increase in vehicle numbers,

accompanied by regularly expanding road constructions. Previous studies have shown that fatality rates in Qatar are much higher than in the developing countries. The number of accident casualties in Qatar has risen to 40, 000 per annum, which is a 17% increase in the number of casualties for 2004 compared to those of 2003; 90% of such casualties are linked to road traffic accidents. (Al Musleh, 2005). Let's take a look at a case. On March 20, 2003, Sugathadasa Atapattu, 56, was taking a stroll after dinner in downtown Doha when he was knocked down by a speeding vehicle. Atapattu was taken to hospital where he lay unconscious for three months. He regained consciousness later but remained bed-ridden and lost his speech. His son came here and took him back home late last year after he spent about eight months in the hospital. At home too, he remains bed-ridden. (Pandit, 2004) You can imagine the impact on Atapattu's life just because of one uneducated careless driver. Atapattu might be bed-ridden all his life, for no mistake of his own. He was just taking a walk and got hit. What did he do to cause this accident? Nothing, but he still has to bear the consequences all his life.

1. 2. 2 FATALITY RATES Figure 1 shows the fatality rates per 10, 000 vehicles licensed. As you can observe, developing countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria and Kenya have the highest fatality rates. Qatar approximately has a fatality rate of 20 per 10000 vehicles Figure 2 uses an alternative approach and shows the fatality rates per 10, 000 persons. Using this measure of death rate, a completely different order of ranking is obtained. As you can clearly observe, Qatar is on the top of the order of ranking. Poor countries such as Ethiopia, India, Niger and Pakistan now appear at the bottom of the order of ranking. Figure 3 shows the relationship between fatality rate (per

10000 vehicles) and vehicle ownership in developed and developing countries. It is clearly observed that as the number of vehicles increase, the number of fatalities decrease. This is a very converse scenario to what one would think. One would think that as number of vehicles increase, number of fatalities should increase. But, this is not the case because we forget to take into fact the population increase of cars and its relation to the number of accidents. As the population of cars increases, the risk of accidents decreases because there is no space for a driver to drive fast and cause accidents. Therefore, number of fatalities decrease, as observed. http://www.transport-links.org/transport_links/filearea/publications/1_603_PA1164_1986.pdf

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Figure 4 shows a comparison of road accident fatalities in 2 developed countries UK and USA; and 2 developing countries UAE and Qatar, in the year 2000. The table lays out the number of motor vehicle deaths and the number of cars in each country. It also shows the death rates per 100, 000 population and per 100, 000 vehicles. Qatar has the second highest fatality rates after the UAE. But both developing countries have generally higher death rates than the developed countries. 1. 2. 3 TRAFFIC CONGESTION Road conditions are generally better in most Gulf states than other developing countries, but dangerous driving is common especially on

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highways. As a result, fatality rates due to traffic accidents are much higher here than other developing countries when compared with vehicle ownership. Most families in the more developed countries own their own car. The car gives people greater mobility and improves their access to places where they work, shop, are educated or find recreation. However, it is the widespread use of the car that is increasing traffic congestion in most cities. It is one of the most serious transport issues relating to cities all over the world. It is a recent problem in Doha but is much less worse than traffic problems in cities like Tokyo or Beijing. Insufficient transport systems and natural increase have made Qatar's traffic problems one of the worst in the Gulf. Roads have been built long back, at a time when population was very low. As population is increasing, roads are becoming less capable to contain high amount of cars. They are not designed for the volume of traffic today. Accidents and traffic jams are very often seen on roundabouts and traffic lights (See Figure 5). Figure 5: A photograph of an accident at the Toyota junction. [pic] <http://www.gulf-times.com> CAUSES The following three sections provide detailed information about some causes of traffic accidents.

2. 1 CONSTRUCTION BOOM The construction boom in Qatar has led to many problems in the traffic scenario of Qatar. Regular road blocks and diversions are seen everywhere, resulting in traffic snarls. When a road is blocked, all cars are diverted to another road. That road may not be able to cope up with such a high number of cars. Sometimes, cars are filled on roads from one junction to another, blocking routes for other cars on the junction. This results in absolute mayhem and chaos. Everyone wants to reach office or drop their kids to school on time. So, they take upon themselves, to swerve

through traffic as they deem correct. They enter roads which have no entry signs, they cut through traffic by driving in the parking lanes or they drive on the footpaths. This causes major traffic accidents where most of the time more than one car is involved. I have seen 3 accidents at the same time, on just 1 stretch of road, which led to staggeringly high amount of traffic.

Basically, one thing leads to another. 2. 2 CARELESS DRIVING Careless driving is identified as the most important factor in traffic accidents, accounting for over 35% of all incidents, while excessive speed is known as the second most common cause. (Bener, 2005). People who drive carelessly and don't abide by the traffic laws are a nuisance on the roads. They don't stop on traffic lights, pedestrian crossings or on road stop signs. They constantly change lanes and confuse others as well as themselves. This

causes confusion to others and they might bang their car into another. 2. 3 STRESS Everyone is stressed in life. If someone has financial problems, another has family problems. A husband has just had a fight with his wife or a youngster has just broken up with his girlfriend. A parent is under stress to get his child to school on time. In all these situations, the driver is driving under so much stress that he cannot give full concentration on the road. I would like to include here an example about myself. Recently, my father died an untimely death due to a cardiac arrest. 4 days after this incident, I went out to buy some grocery nearby and I had a terrible accident. I hit a car and injured the other driver. I recall no memory of seeing that car or of the accident. All I know is that I hit a car. This was all due to the stress and tension I was under. I was so stressed about the problems in my life that I wasn't concentrating on the road at all; therefore I didn't notice this car

approaching me and hit it head-on. There are several cases out there like these, where stress overcomes the driver and they lose control of the situation. It is known as one of the major causes of accidents in recent times. Stress accounts for an estimated 12.8m lost working days a year in Britain and costs businesses at least \$4bn. It is difficult to measure how much of this can be put down to commuting, but in one study 44% of drivers named rush-hour traffic as the most stressful aspect of their lives. (Hall, 2006) EFFECTS 3.

1 INCREASED INSURANCE RATES A whole lot of insurance companies have increased their insurance rates and the amount of paperwork, due to the alarming rise in the number of accidents. Some insurance companies even had to shut down some of their branches, because they couldn't bear the losses. The money an insurance provider has to dole out in claims for death and injuries as well as vehicle repairs in accidents run into millions of riyals. One such insurance provider said it lost QR2.2m in the first half of 2005 due to compensation given in cases of accident-related deaths and injuries. (, 2005). So, just because of mistakes of others, innocent drivers have to face higher insurance rates. 3. 2 INCREASED FATALITY RATES Statistics suggest there were 840 road accidents in January 2003 with the number going up to 1,173 in January this year. In February 2003, road accidents totalled 675 but in February 2005, the figure reached 1,086. (, 2005). As the number of accidents is rising, the number of fatalities is rising also. Many people are dying because of traffic accidents. Some die due to mistakes of others too. A speeding car may hit a pedestrian and kill them for no mistake of their own. In 2004, 165 people died in road accidents with 79 per cent of the victims being in the age group of 11-40 and 35 per cent being pedestrians. In 2005,

125 people were killed on the roads. (Bibbo, 2005) PROBLEMS OF REDUCING TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS Problems of reducing traffic accidents are many. Firstly, youngsters between the age group of 16-24 have a tendency to drive very fast. It is an ego problem. They think they have to drive fast to look cool and show off. I can say this because it partly relates to me. No matter how much they are taught, they will continue to drive fast. Even though public awareness is apparent, it is not enough, because they do not truly realize the consequences. Even if they are involved in an accident, they shrug it off as a mistake from the past and continue doing the same, until an accident does not take their life. Only if they can practically see the effect of some horrible accidents, and only if they themselves go through a rough time, then they will realize what their actions can do to society. Secondly, punishments are not enough. There are only meagre fines on breaking the traffic law. Other than that, there are no other punishments given to troublesome drivers. That's why no one understands the problem because for them it is not a problem at all. No one goes around killing people because they know the punishment for murder is death. Therefore, if punishments are increased for breaking traffic rules, then they will realize it as a problem they should not cause and will become cautious drivers. Lastly, fines are too low. There is only a meagre fine of QR200 on breaking the speed limit. Local Qataris are very rich and they get off by paying small fines. Paying money is not a big deal for them. You can see cars with 10 fine stickers on them, because they don't care. They can either pay it off from their large bank accounts, or call their friends in the traffic police and get the fines cancelled. CONCLUSION No matter how much one tries to avoid an accident, it is evident that when an

accident has to happen, it will happen. If one knew that an accident is going to take place then surely one would avoid it. But, what is in our hands is our safety. We can not avoid accidents but at least we can make sure that we are properly prepared for the situation.

5. 1 FUTURE PLANS FROM THE GOVERNMENT

The Ministry has said that Qatar plans to spend over QR1bn over the next three years for the expansion and improvement of its road network, keeping in the view the rapid pace of urbanisation and population growth. Their main concern will be on replacing all major roundabouts in and outside Doha with modern traffic junctions. Tenders for the TV, Midmac, Al Ahli and Passport roundabouts have been released around 3 years ago and work has already started on some and some are already finished. I think this is appropriate because all the above roundabouts are the very congested roundabouts of Doha. Only congested roundabouts should be changed into traffic junctions because it costs a lot of money to change a roundabout into a traffic signal. Previously announced plans of constructing five flyovers and interchange overpasses in and around Doha to cope with increasing volumes of traffic by the start of the new millennium are underway. There are five interchange overpasses in Qatar at present. New radar systems are also being installed to catch drivers jumping traffic lights or speeding (See Figures 6 & 7). Plans are afoot to install 101 radars and cameras all over Qatar to check traffic violations and accidents. 53 mobile radar cabins and 48 cameras are to be installed at traffic signals over the next six months, which would go a long way in ensuring road safety. (Al Malki, 2005) Figure 6: This is a photograph of traffic policemen setting up radar surveillance equipment by the side of roads in Doha. [pic] <http://www.gulf-times.com>

Figure 7: This is a new radar camera installed to detect those who jump traffic lights at the Ramada junction in Doha. [pic] <http://www.gulf-times.com> Several amendments to the traffic law will now impose stiffer penalties including jail terms on unscrupulous motorists. Violators of the traffic rules will face fines from QR6, 000 up to QR12, 000 and jail terms between one and six months. Driving without a valid number plate, without a licence or engaging in racing and jumping traffic signals, will also be considered serious violations which will carry a fine. The measures are the last in a number of initiatives by governmental bodies that aim to curb the death toll on the road. (Bibbo, 2005) The law prescribes a fine of QR200 for a motorist using a mobile phone while driving. A hands-free set can, however, be used. A similar fine is to be imposed on motorists watching TV while driving. People making children under 10 years of age sit in the front of a vehicle are to be fined QR200 too. (Al Dosri, 2005)

5. 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

A fully computerized traffic control system needs to be put in place; a system which automatically notes out drivers that are a danger to society. Radars have to be put in place, not only on signals, but also on roads, to catch drivers driving above speed limits. Any driver caught 3 times on radar should have his license revoked for a temporary period. Drivers who are often a cause of accidents should be blacklisted and monitored. These are some ways accidents can be reduced. Wearing a seat belt while driving, concentrating totally on driving and nothing else, and following all driving regulations will ensure our safety. In any case of an accident, police and medical authorities have to be prepared also. We can ensure this by following few of these ideas:

1. Training police and medical staff in first aid and handling traffic injuries.
- 2.

Equipping ambulances with state-of-the-art equipment. 3. Improving hospital emergency rooms and facilities 4. Training medical staff to handle injuries at a crash site as well as in hospitals 5. Improving coordination between police, emergency response teams and medical services Movement of heavy duty vehicles should be restricted on the roads to minimize traffic accidents. The traffic police have advanced the morning peak hours by half an hour to start from 6am, instead of 6. 30am now. The morning peak hours would be from 6am to 8am, and in the afternoon from 12. 30pm to 2pm, same as now.

During the peak hours, movement of heavy-duty vehicles and machinery will be banned from city roads. (Marafia, 2004) This will come as a benefit to office-going public and schoolchildren. REFERENCES Al Binali, D. H. (2004).

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