

# GAMBIT – POLAND’S LONG-TERM ROAD SAFETY PROGRAMME

R. KRYSZEK, K. JAMROZ, L. MICHALSKI

Department of Highway Engineering, Gdańsk University of Technology, Poland  
rkrystek@pg.gda.pl

## ABSTRACT

Poland’s traffic risk reached its maximum in 1991 at 22 victims/100,000 population. The factors contributing to this figure included growing traffic, a lack of preventive measures and the freedom Poland gained in 1989 when the country became politically and economically independent. In 1992 Poland was visited by a group of World Bank experts whose task was to write the report “Road Safety in Poland”. In those days public administration underestimated the size of the economic and social loss of road accidents. Consequently, the report’s role in stepping up road safety work was critical. The experts’ suggestions included the setting up of the National Road Safety Council and the development of a long-term road safety programme. The Council was established in October 1993, and in 1994 the Transport Minister commissioned the programme. The first draft of the Gambit Programme was presented at the XX World Road Congress. Today, let us present the effects.

## KEY WORDS

ROAD SAFETY / PROGRAMMES / ACCIDENTS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1989 marked the beginning of a major social and economic change in Poland as the centralised economy moved towards free market economy. The country’s economic development had a significant influence on transport demand. It was evident in road traffic as the number of killed increased dramatically to double in 1991 compared to 1985 (fig. 1).

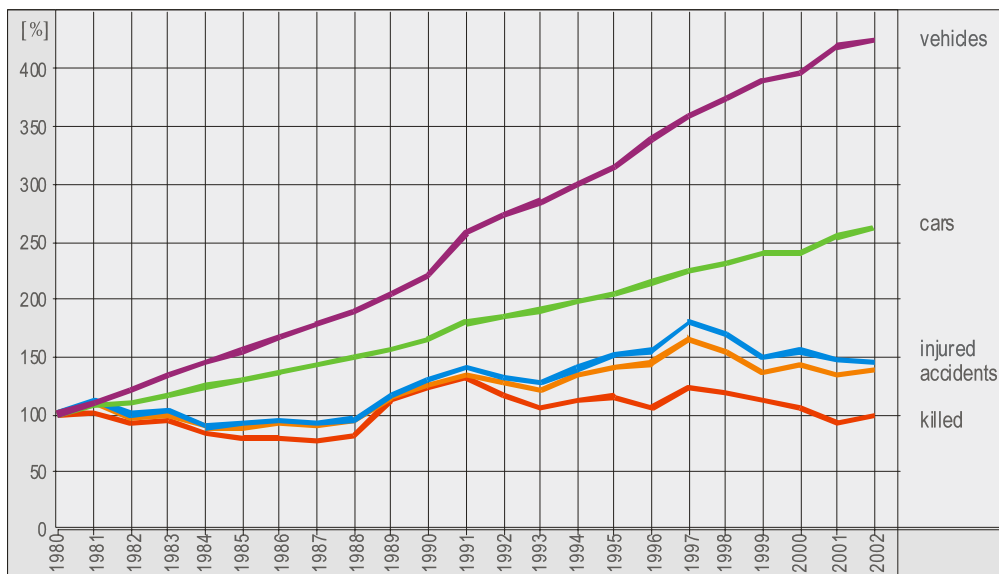


Figure 1 – Accidents, casualties and car rates in 1980-2002

The 1992 Road Safety in Poland report and its publication set a milestone in Poland's road safety work (WB, 1992). The report contained two important conclusions;

- the government and top politicians must be made responsible for road safety; this led to the establishment of the National Road Safety Council headed by the Deputy Prime Minister,
- there must be a long-term road safety programme based on the experience of countries with a long history of such efforts; this led to the development of the first integrated road safety programme GAMBIT 96 commissioned by the Minister of Transport with the Research Committee; it was developed in 1994-96.

One of the first publications about the joint work of GAMBIT 96 authors with international research centres was presented at the XX Road Congress in Montreal in 1995 (Krystek, 1995). Today is a good opportunity to present briefly the results of 8 years of experience from implementing the GAMBIT Programme.

The events in chronological order:

1992 – the World Bank report,

1994-96 – development of GAMBIT 96,

1997-99 – implementing the programme in the regions,

1999 – the country's administrative structure changes from 3 to 4 levels (central, regions, counties and municipalities),

1999 – establishment of the Polish GRSP – Global Road Safety Partnership,

2000 – the Minister of Transport commissions an update of GAMBIT 2000 to match the country's new administrative structure,

2001 – the Council of Ministers approves GAMBIT 2000 as Poland's programme for 2010,

2001 – the Road Traffic Act is revised making the government responsible for reporting on its road safety work before the Parliament,

2001-2003 – transposition of European Union regulations concerning transport of people and goods and driver working time into the Polish law,

2002 – the government commissions a training programme for road safety professionals funded from a World Bank loan.

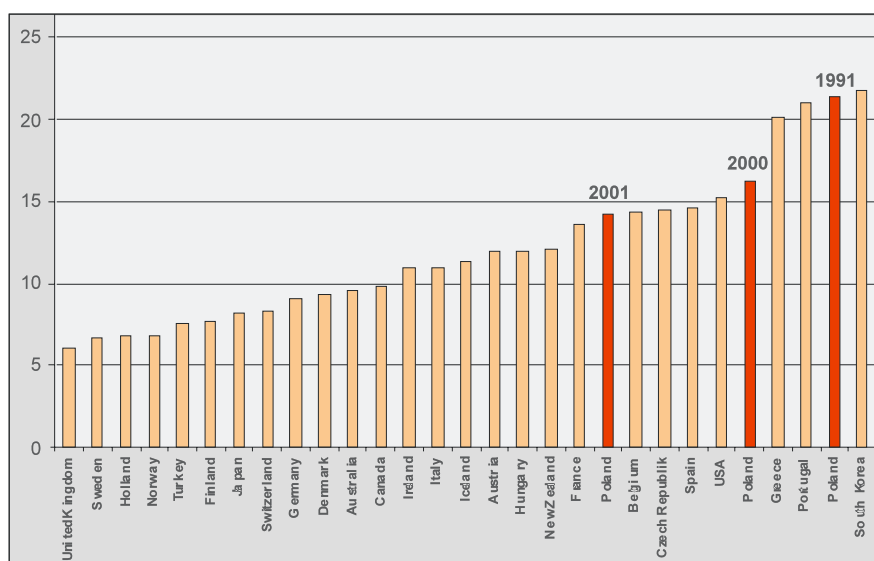


Figure 2 – Road accident fatalities per 100,000 population in OECD countries.

This methodical work aimed at improving Poland's road safety fits in well with European Union policies which attach a lot of weight to the relation between transport systems and the traffic risk and quality of life of EU citizens. The recent programme "EU transport policy – Time for a decision" sets out the basics of the EU's transport policy with emphasis on road safety as a criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of transport systems.

The National Programme is designed as the central government's road safety policy with a direct or indirect effect on road user behaviour and regional and local road safety activity. The Programme should help create the basis for road safety work by local governments. What this means is that all regional road safety programmes should be based on in-depth regional diagnoses to better formulate the needs and at the same time follow the main guidelines of the National Programme.

## **2. GAMBIT 2000**

10 years of road safety efforts by a number of institutions, organisations and individuals have helped reach a significant risk reduction. In 1991 there were 22 killed per 100,000 population, 10 years later it is only 15, nearly the European Union average (fig. 2).

Two main aspects must be stressed:

- Poland is nearing the EU average which in the context of Poland's efforts to join the EU is a strong argument, in particular in assessing the progress Poland is making,
- a big progress has been made in implementing systemic road safety work; political and social awareness are growing, the news media take a bigger interest in road safety, there have been good legislative and implementation examples helping to take the National Programme's strategy to the regional and local level. The overall effect is a certain road safety stability; for the last six years there has been a downward trend in road traffic fatalities.

GAMBIT 2000 includes a structure for road safety management in Poland. Its efficient operation is key to the Programme's success. Regional road safety councils have a special role to play as they are at the meeting point of two strategies applied throughout GAMBIT 2000:

- the top-down strategy carried out by government administration covering areas such as legislation, technical inspiration and stable funding. This should help establish the legal framework, ensure that regional and local action follows the strategies and should stimulate local governments and non-governmental organisations.
- the bottom-up strategy carried out by local governments that have responsibility for programming and implementing regional work in line with the National Programme and with due consideration of local needs.

GAMBIT 2000 describes the four main road safety problems that need to be tackled first: excessive speed, alcohol, young drivers and vulnerable road users. A long-term strategy and two targets are part of the programme (fig. 3):

- short-term target; maximum of 5500 fatalities in 2003,
- long-term target; maximum of 4000 in 2010.

The work to be completed is divided into two groups:

- systemic work; safety management structure and how it should be organised, revision of acts of law, improvement of the road safety information system,

implementation of the road safety audit and implementation of continuous education for road safety professionals.

- pilot projects; “speed”, “pedestrian and cyclist”, “driver” and “road”.

The first regional programmes that followed the national programme GAMBIT’96 would begin with an in-depth road safety analysis using police road accident data. It helped us establish the extent of the main road safety problems such as excessive speed or speed not adequate for the conditions, drunk road users, young drivers or high risk concentration sites. That was followed by a programme of long-term and short-term work designed to address the priority areas that could be solved with the technical and manpower resources available. The funding, however, was very unstable.

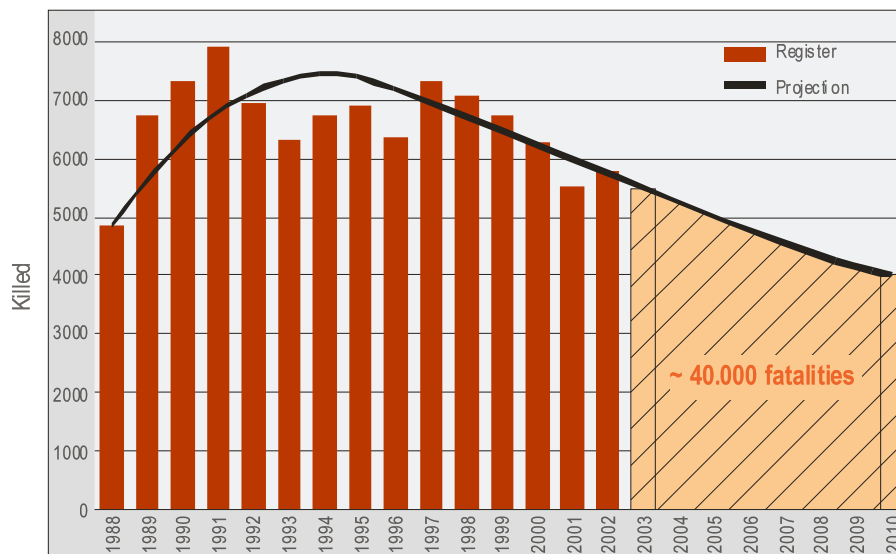


Figure 3 – Projection of killed on Polish roads by 2010

New regional and local programmes include new ways of planning prevention work. They now have the following consecutive phases:

- diagnosis of not only the state of road safety, its main problems and high risk groups, but also of the road safety system in place, i.e. how road safety is managed, staffing, the relations between those with main responsibility for the programme,
- programme assumptions,
- long-term action strategy in line with the State and regional policies,
- operational programme fitting in with the European Union’s operational programme for 2004-2006,
- an annual programme to be adopted by regional road safety councils in December as the next year’s programme following the approval of next year’s budget and plans.

### 3. SUCCESS AND FAILURES

The GRSP programme is clearly a success. Poland is one of the European countries to follow up on the World Bank initiative and implement the GRSP project. This was possible because the country met the basic requirements:

- government administration was happy to implement the project involving local governments, the research community and private sector and was ready to support road safety work,

- the country had a governmental road safety programme in place,
- the country had road safety management structure in place.

Educating the public is perhaps the most important outcome of GRSP work which included campaigns about safety of children in cars and student awareness raising. The Polish GRSP Committee has had a few successes. The most recent one is a book for politicians – a 64 page publication titled "Road unsafety – myths and facts", printed in 10,000 copies. The project was fully funded by Shell Poland.

Our biggest failure has been the inability to convince the Parliament about the need to revise the Road Traffic Act by adding the speed limit of 50 km/h in built-up areas. We argued our case three times, explaining why the current limit of 60 km/h should be abandoned, but the Parliament could not be convinced. One reason why the Parliament would not agree with us was that Poland has no network of motorways. Consequently, towns must accommodate transit traffic. There is no doubt that car industry lobbying has a very strong presence in the Parliament while vulnerable road users have no representation.

We still do not have a stable system of funding for GAMBIT. The allocations from the central state budget are insufficient to pay for prevention work at the regional level.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Shortly it will have been a decade of systemic road safety work in Poland following the philosophy set out in the National Programme GAMBIT 96 and continued in GAMBIT 2000. There have been a number of obstacles from a lack of political will to solve the problem, through a lack of social awareness about the extent of the risk to a lack of stable funding for prevention work. Today we are proud to say that regional implementation of GAMBIT has been satisfactory.

We believe that further work should have the following activities in its focus:

- intensified efforts at the regional level to obtain central funding; the regional success to date supports what GAMBIT authors have been claiming, i.e. the best way to inspire regional work is for the National Road Safety Council to fund regions that are most active in building road safety systems and implementing road safety schemes,
- intensified regional efforts to stimulate local action in the counties; e.g. a regional database is the condition for building county databases,
- extending prevention work to the international level, e.g. as part of Euroregions to initiate regional co-operation in cross-border schemes,
- prepare road safety professionals for co-ordinated action when Poland joins the EU. In April 2003 the Ministry of Infrastructure developed the Sectoral Operational Programme for transport (MI, 2003) making road safety one of its priorities.

There is a clear need for carrying out the above, especially because of the EU's transport policy which plans to allocate special funds to help bridge the gaps between the "Fifteen" and the new members. And transposition of EU procedures takes time.

#### **REFERENCES**

GAMBIT (2000): National Road Safety Programme. Joint Authors' Team. Warsaw 2000.  
 Krystek, R. (1995): GAMBIT – Integrated Programme of Road Safety Improvement in Poland. XXth World Road Congress, Montréal. Vol. Individual Papers, pp. 426 –431.

MI (2003): Sectoral Operational Programme – Transport 2004-2006. Ministry of Infrastructure. Warsaw 2003.

WB (1992): Road Safety in Poland. World Bank Report, 1992.