





ASK NOT FOR WHOM THE ROAD TOLLS

“ROAD DEATHS REPRESENT A HUGE BURDEN ON OUR HEALTH SYSTEMS AND AN OBSTACLE TO OUR EFFORTS TO OVERCOME POVERTY. I CALL ON THE WORLD COMMUNITY TO WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE OUR ROADS SAFE.”

– Desmond Tutu, Emeritus Archbishop of Cape Town, November, 2009

March 2, 2010 was a very good day for five million of the ten million people expected to die on the world’s roads in the coming decade. On this day the United Nations would adopt a General Assembly Resolution on the Global Road Safety Crisis, to make 2010 to 2020 a “Decade of Action for Road Safety.” The goal: reduce by 50% the anticipated deaths (often called “road carnage” by world leaders outside the US). The Global Road Federation estimates that 1.2 million die yearly on roads and 260,000 of them are children. Traffic death is now the world’s number one killer of children over age five. If the “Decade of Action” succeeds, five million lives will be saved. To put it in perspective, losing five million souls would be like losing every man, woman and child in my home state of Colorado. Losing ten million is unfathomable.

Some leaders are taking the Global Road Safety Crisis seriously, and taking action. New York City Mayor and philanthropist Michael Bloomberg

has donated \$125 million from his personal estate to the road safety effort. “Over 90% of the world’s fatalities on roads occur in low- and middle-income countries,” said Bloomberg. “This initiative will serve as a catalyst for government, nongovernmental, and population level action to significantly reduce traffic crash deaths and injuries.”

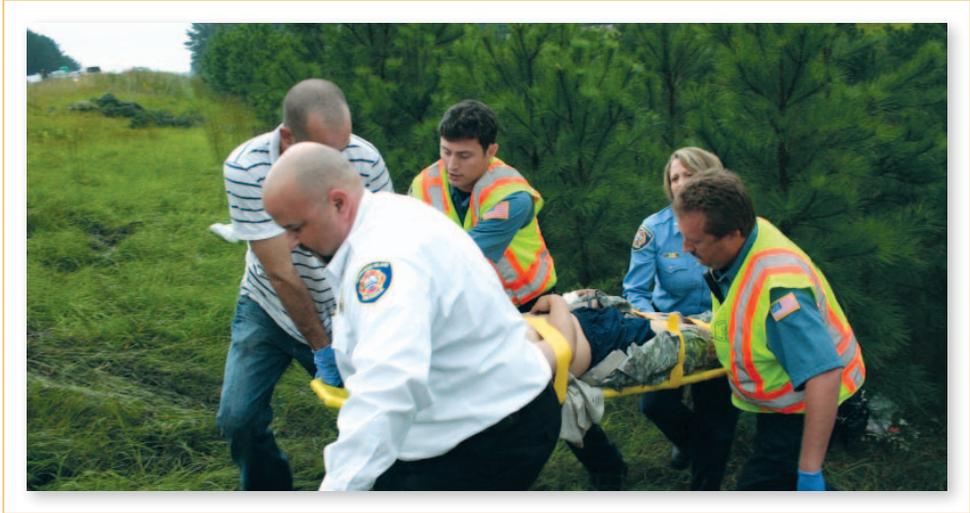
SAFETY DATA SUGGEST THAT ROAD USER CHARGING WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO SAVING LIVES.

In China, the world’s most populous and fastest road building nation, road carnage is now the leading cause of death for those 45 years old and younger. China’s highway per capita death rate has doubled in the last 20 years. While their rate of auto ownership is still much lower than that of the United States, China loses lives on roads at a rate of 16.5 people per 100,000 of population, while the US loses 13.9. In the United States, our annual traffic deaths in the interstate era hovers around 40,000. That means that in the next ten years only about 3% of the deaths worldwide will occur

in the United States. The US has 5% of the world’s population. Will it be possible for the US to cut the death toll in half on our own roads in the next ten years? What would it take?

In an article published in the Winter 2008 *Tollways* called *Toll vs. Nontoll: Toll Facilities Are Safer* by Jeff Campbell, we learned that based on 2005 data, the number of fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled on toll roads was 0.50, where the fatal accident rate for all U.S. highways was 1.47, indicating that toll roads are considerably safer.

If this is true then one way to save lives in the United States would be to implement tolling on more roads, for example, toll the national interstate highway system. Many in our industry have identified road user charging schemes such as a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) fees as the long term answer for funding highway programs in the United States. The “pay as you go” strategy for road financing is possibly the only real option to replace the fuel tax that feeds the bankrupt highway trust fund. The safety data suggest that in addition to solving the worst highway funding crisis in US history, road user charging in the United States would



also contribute to saving lives. Based on the data, the saved lives could be very significant. Could it be the 20,000 we are seeking to save?

Another, and less controversial, way that we could save lives on our highways is through the use of intelligent transportation systems (ITS). There are only a few studies that link ITS deployment to safety benefits. Since there are few statistics to support how ITS might saves lives, let's look at a specific example. In 2002, 42,815 people died on U.S. highways. I'm going to tell you about just one of them.

A short time after 35-year-old Orlando obstetrician Dr. N. Donald Diebel performed a surgery that made my first daughter's life possible, I read

an Orlando Sentinel article about his tragic death on the Florida Turnpike. In June of 2002, Dr. Diebel and his family happened upon a recently rolled over pickup truck in the median of the Turnpike with a newlywed couple trapped inside. He parked beside the road and went to administer first aid. Moments later, an 18 wheeled behemoth swerved into the median to miss the queued and stationary vehicles. In that terrible instant, two Good Samaritans, 26 year old Shane Kelly, an off duty fireman and Dr. Diebel, were dead under the crushing blow of a 40 ton sledgehammer. Don's wife Karen and his three young children, sitting in the car beside the highway where their Daddy had gone to save another life, witnessed his death. When the car door shut, they didn't know he would never



slip back in behind the wheel and take them home.

I met him only once in the waiting room of the hospital, but Dr. Diebel was a man more impressive to me in real life than any doctor portrayed on TV. I can see him pulling back that aqua surgical mask and telling me that the delicate procedure had been successful and would secure my unborn daughter's place in the world. I would hold her in my arms in only a few months. He made her life possible, but he would never see her smiling face.

Could an upstream dynamic message sign have warned truck driver Robert Lee Jackson of the stopped vehicles ahead, giving him reason to down-shift and save the life of Dr. Diebel?

Although ITS instrumentation of the Turnpike was underway in 2002, it would be years before they would have the full complement of signs, cameras and detectors they have today. Today there would be a much higher probability that Robert Jackson might have seen or heard a warning and slowed down.

ITS cannot *prevent* accidents and there is no guarantee motorists will see, hear and act on the information we give them. Research indicates that ITS provides a better, safer highway, especially in the potential reduction of secondary accidents like the one that took Dr. Diebel. ITS can save lives. Not just statistical lives, but the real beating hearts of fathers, sons, mothers and daughters. A Dr. Don Diebel behind

the surgical mask, still with us, still saving lives, still bringing children into the world. Unfortunately, Dr. Diebel is gone, but not forgotten to the thousands he helped in a career cut short by just one of the fatal accidents of 2002. Please visit <http://www.dondiebel.com/Home.html> for more information.

Dr. Diebel would not rest in peace for years. The criminal charges and civil lawsuits related to the incident were only recently resolved. Forced into the public eye, Karen Diebel became an advocate for her husband's causes, founding the N. Donald Diebel, Jr. M.D. Good Samaritan Fund in 2004, which has provided medical care to thousands of uninsured women and children annually. Her family tragedy also fueled the passage of the "Move Over" highway safety law in Florida. Her civic duties artfully fulfilled have given political party leaders cause to encourage her to run for public office, and she currently is in a hotly contested congressional race in Florida.

In the United States, our politicians and citizenry are ever ready to help countries recover from catastrophic natural disasters. The Haitian earthquake death toll is now thought to be 230,000

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souls, equal to the 2004 Asian Tsunami. Although the Global Road Safety Crisis is taking five times that many lives every year (1.2 million), it is not a single tragedy the media can track. Desmond Tutu states it well:

"We ignore road crashes at our peril. This epidemic is invisible through its ubiquity, yet when we stop to add together the daily toll in each neighborhood or city, each country and region, we can comprehend the true tragedy: 3,500 people killed every day, thousands more seriously injured; 260,000 children killed every year, and more than a million more seriously injured, with barely a voice raised in protest."

This is why the UN Resolution is important, as it will focus the attention of some very capable and influential people and organizations on the problem. Organizations like IBTTA.



Of the 10 recommendations made to the UN General assembly by the Commission for Global Road Safety, consider number eight:

“High-income, high performing countries should also recognize their obligation to share their experience and know-how with low and middle income countries, through study exchanges and technical partnerships, and by enabling the transfer of knowledge and supporting implementation projects.”

As members of IBTTA, let’s participate in the decade of action for road

safety. Let’s focus a meeting on global toll road safety. Let’s pick a toll road in the United States and adopt a zero fatality vision to demonstrate the state of the art for safety. Let’s aggressively deploy life saving ITS technologies on our toll roads, tunnels and bridges. While revenues are down and those big capital projects are on the shelf, let’s focus on moving forward with lower cost, efficient projects and programs to enhance operations and safety.

Let’s reach outside our borders to share our knowledge of life saving design, technology, driver education, operation, maintenance, ITS and

incident management with those countries who are suffering the most. Most of us are familiar with the “Adopt-a-Highway” concept in the United States for litter removal. Perhaps we could jointly adopt a poorly performing highway in a poor country and work toward reducing the fatalities.

The effort to reach out to less fortunate nations is consistent with the Good Samaritan ethic. The day Dr. Diebel died was not the first time he played the role of Good Samaritan. He and his father spent their “vacations” on missions to Honduras to provide free medical services to underprivileged communities. Dr. Diebel gave his life on one of our toll roads to help one of our customers. We can honor his sacrifice and follow his example by being Good Samaritans to the world community, specifically the five million people who need our help to stay alive.

Poet John Donne gave us words every bit as relevant to the value of a life today as when published in 1624: “any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

In our industry, we toll to service our debt, but we also toll to service our customers. Part of that service is to do all that we can to keep them alive and get them home safely. The data shows we are doing it well, but we can do better. The knowledge we have gained in how to operate a safe toll road we can share with the world. The next time you hear a politician or customer griping about tolls and rate increases, you might consider telling them to “ask not for whom the road tolls, it tolls for thee.”

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