

# Thoughts on Road Traffic Control

**Róbert Major**

ORCID: 0000-0002-8571-4592

**Gábor Mészáros**

ORCID: 0000-0001-9862-5276

National University of Public Service, Hungary

**Abstract.** *The safety of travel on public roads is one of the most important issues to be developed in Hungary and in the European Union. The authors conducted a survey on the current state of the topic in Hungary. They examine the actions undertaken in traffic safety and traffic control in the past years in the country. Vehicle drivers consider regulations on speed limits and overspeeding to be less respectable and acceptable. The absolute transgression of the speed limit, also known as overspeeding, significantly increases the risk of accidents, and also adds to the severity of accidents, considering the majority of the traumas and the occurrence of fatalities in these accidents. Overspeeding is the greatest problem point in road traffic safety issues such as speeding, drunk driving and the use of passive road traffic safety gear. Considering the fatal road accidents in Hungary, it has become evident that the number of absolute overspeeding cases is significantly increasing. Overspeeding plays a significant role in the severity of the accident, especially in cases of unprotected travellers, pedestrians and cyclists. Traffic control is part of influencing the awareness and education of safe travelling. Police traffic control and accident prevention programmes aim to decrease the number of victims of road traffic accidents.*

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## Introduction

In contemporary criminology and the fight against criminality, it has been stated that most criminal cases cannot be prevented only by the means of legal regulation. To set up effective crime prevention, legal and extralegal instruments are needed.

The fight against criminal cases committed in traffic has to be considered as part of the fight against criminal cases as a whole. In Hungary, accidents that cause serious injuries which take more than eight days to heal are considered to be offences. Accidents that cause injuries healing in less than eight days or only a loss of goods are only considered to be motoring offences under the law since these cases are judged to be less harmful to the society than the previously mentioned ones.

The degree of the injury caused in the accident is irrelevant, however, from the perspective of prevention efforts. Therefore, we need to state that it is more important to emphasise the efforts made in preventing the accidents rather than the prevention of guilt in the prevention of motoring deviances. It is evident that we have to aim at decreasing the severity of the accidents with the introduction of passive means of security and the forcing of their use.

*Safety of common road traffic is an important social interest. The following of traffic rules and the prediction that they are also followed by co-drivers are the two basic terms of safe and uninterrupted traffic. On the other hand, it is also needed that the traffic participants should be patient and considerate to each other.*

*(Preamble of dictate on the road traffic regulation)*

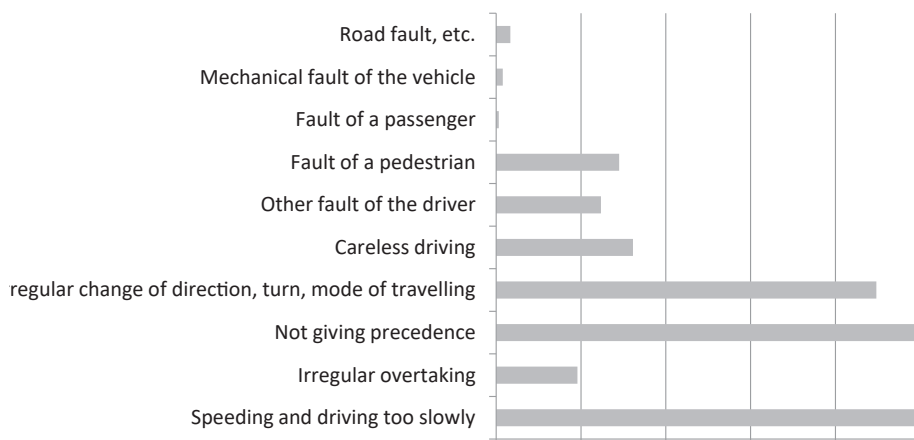
## Main Part

Despite the introduction to the road traffic rules of unambiguous instructions to follow, it is a fact that in the years following the millennium, the number of the victims of lethal road accidents is three times more than the number of victims of crime attempted against persons every year.

Analysing the reasons for the traffic accidents, it can be stated that they show a similar distribution every year. The majority of accidents involve exceeding the speed limit. These cases include both absolute and relative exceeding of the speed limit. It is noticeable that in Hungary, accident statistics consist of accidents causing personal injury without considering them to be guilty of a motoring offence. In a more thorough analysis, it can be noticed that the exceeding of the speed limit that caused the accident was a relative kind of exceeding. (Source of the statistic data is the policemen taking action at the site of the crime. Since he or she is serving data preceding the calculations of an expert, there can be significant mistakes in the data provided).

Second main cause of accidents is breaking the rules of precedence. Breaking the rules of changing directions and turning are also causes of accidents<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 1. Causes of accidents in Hungary**



Source: own study

*Police traffic control is the state's visible and hidden observatory presence in public road traffic.* Police road traffic control affects the citizens' behaviour in a way that it makes them aware of the risk that they might go through visible or hidden means of traffic control. Traffic control is justified by the fact that most of the road traffic accidents happen because drivers break the applicable rules. This fact necessitates the fight against accidents, which is implemented via the actions undertaken by the authorities in order to prevent those cases of breaking the rules that lead to road traffic accidents. For this reason, the police are part of the lifelong learning process that aims to develop the proper behaviour of the participants of road traffic.

<sup>1</sup> Source of dates: Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

In order to free both the police as an organisation and police people from frustration, it is important to consider that participants of traffic worldwide see police as maintainers of smooth traffic, but they are against visible or hidden means of road traffic control, as well as taking action against those who overspeed. One must understand though that a significant proportion of road traffic participants demands both of the abovementioned police activities. The different perspectives of the two groups is not accidental — it comes down to their different road traffic roles, interests and various behaviours. This makes it reasonable to gain and maintain the trust and support of the second group. This is of primary importance because nobody is able to produce perfect, obedient behaviour. All of those who are part of the obedient road traffic group occasionally break the rules, only more rarely and under circumstances of reduced risk. At the recording of a police control action, it is important to consider the dangerousness of the act, which affects both the person and the society.

*There is no doubt that there is a tight correlation between stationary incidents and mobile incidents.* The lack of a penalty on stationary incidents (especially irregular parking cases) encourages drivers to infringe or even break the law at their own discretion. They judge those rules that are inconvenient to them as superfluous, while they take the convenient rules as valuable and valid. *Arbitrary interpretation of the law becomes replaced by arbitrary application of the law.* This is why one must not neglect any infringement that is committed by a police officer. It is indisputable that mobile breaches of the law are the most perilous to road traffic, therefore the prevention of such mobile breaches of the law has to be emphasised to a great extent.

The consideration of the effectiveness of police actions is a constant dilemma. It is questioned whether the traffic police is effective in those cases where it controls the greatest possible amount of participants of traffic or sanctions the greatest number of participants of traffic compared to the number of actions taken in a given period of time. From the fundamental principle, it can be stated that this set of questions are based on a false hypothesis, so they can badly mislead the perception and judgement of effectiveness. If the activity aims to prevent accidents, then the indices cannot be other than the number of accidents that were prevented.

Combined with other means of traffic control, road checks have major importance among traffic police activities. They aim at preventing accidents and securing the flow of traffic. This dual purpose originates in the basic purpose of traffic, that is, the need for locomotion. The prevention of road traffic accidents is served by the revealing of burdens of the flow of traffic together with the preventing and the counteracting the breaches of the law.

Police presence cannot be passive — it has to be an active presence and comprised of real activity. Naturally, the active counteracting action must be preceded by an observing, analysing process, since this is the only way to initiate an effective intervention.

*The main missions of traffic control can be concluded as the following:*

- supporting the constant flow of traffic;
- ensuring that the traffic rules are obeyed;
- revealing accidents and other breaches of the law, apprehending the contravener;
- education of traffic safety.

## Supporting the flow of traffic

The main purpose of traffic is locomotion. Participants of traffic have a basic need for rapidness and safety of locomotion. As traffic volumes increase, there is a growing need for traffic safety, as well as the smooth flow of traffic. The traffic participants are keenly aware of whether the traffic flow is smooth or stop-start. Constant movement of the traffic means more than a perception of comfort and a prevention of conflicts: it also has an economic impact. Stopping and restarting the car repeatedly means a loss of time with more fuel consumption and a higher level of pollution.

There is a wide range of equipment for the securing of the flow of traffic, but they all require a police officer as an active helper to the traffic. Since traffic is a complicated system, it is a common fact that the police officer cannot perceive the starting cause of a traffic jam because it typically originates a significant physical distance from him or her. It is also a basic statement that road conditions, mostly the capacity of intersections, limits police actions.

Common police tasks in the support of the flow of traffic are counteracting and removing the present burdens on the traffic which they can perceive, and if this is not feasible, the guidance of traffic becomes needed. The most common burdens are caused by the vehicles or the road conditions. Broken down vehicles can become burdens on the road. In such cases, drivers must be commanded and even helped to remove the vehicle from the road. It often happens in cases with property damage that drivers cannot come to a solution, and they cause congestion while they debate for a long time.

## Ensuring that the traffic rules are obeyed

Traffic rules exist to support traffic safety. The aim of setting such rules is to secure safety and maintain order. One of the most important traffic policing tasks of the police is ensuring that the traffic rules are obeyed. Most unfortunately, obedient behaviour of participants of traffic can only be achieved by conditioning the of fear of punishment in the drivers. Fear of punishment is only effective if it theoretically eventuates in every case and becomes real, in practical reality, as often as possible and needed.

This includes the premise that neither the police force nor a police officer should neglect a single case of breaking the law. The implementation of a sanction follows a police action in disobedient cases, outside police powers.

The perception of a case of a breach of the road rules is based on the police officer's knowledge and competence in the representation and documentation of the rules concerning the case<sup>2</sup>. The lack of such competences is the responsibility of the police officer's leadership since the police is a hierarchical organisation. This is the central point which organises a system of trainings and further trainings, and control of enforcement.

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<sup>2</sup> If this condition is not met, it provides a justification for the breaker of the law to question the police action's rightfulness. This might easily lead to a citizen-police officer debate.

## **Revealing accidents and other breaches of the law, apprehending the contravener**

The police has a mission to clarify the circumstances of the accident and to investigate the facts relating to it as soon and as possible and in as much detail as possible. This activity is not included in traffic control, but the revealing of cases that break the law is exemplary. Police patrol only conduct the procedure at an accident when it is less severe than simple personal injury. When the accident causes more serious injuries, specially trained accident forensics perform the investigation of the scene with special equipment.

The mission of traffic control is not only beneficial in road traffic policing but in external areas of policing too. It also helps in detecting criminals that used vehicles for committing their crime or detecting the vehicles used by criminals and the logistic issues connected to them.

## **Education of traffic safety**

Road traffic control is part of the process of safe traffic education. Voluntary obedience to the law can be favoured by well fulfilled control. Whenever the controlled person appreciates the necessity of control together with the fact that breaking the law is dangerous for him or her and the other participants of the traffic, and obeying the rules is for his or her own and others' safety, the educating effect of police road traffic control is efficient. For example, it is important to highlight at a control action that a driver must have a driving license because those drivers who are not trained to have a license are dangerous to others. Another case is where the medical certificate of the driving license is not valid, since medical examination helps drivers to take part in traffic in the best health condition, in order to preserve their and other travelers' safety. In both cases, drivers can be convinced of this.

All those actions that serve only to demonstrate power and not accident prevention cause an opposite effect. This is well demonstrated by cases when *e.g.* a driver is pulled over on a rural road at night far from a built-up area and the police officer asks him or her to get out of the car and show all of his or her documents. In the end, the driver is fined because he or she is not wearing a safety vest. Traffic policing of the police, especially traffic control, has to be part of the educational process in obedient traffic behaviour.

Guidance of traffic activity on roads is an important mission of the police. A police officer has to follow the rules of road traffic. Participants of traffic are reluctant obey rules that are not adhered to by the police officers themselves. It is also difficult to select the person to be controlled from within a large group of law breakers. The controlled one nearly always complains that he or she is the only one stopped and not the others. In these cases of traffic control, the police officer needs several skills: communication competence, professional knowledge, situational awareness skills, and he or she has to act in a decisive manner. The natural condition of the situation is that the police officer needs to remain polite and dominate the situation. The police officer can never be rough or violent without a reason — neither verbally

nor physically. This is extremely demanding in a situation when the police officers' competence is being questioned. The police officer has to reflect by his or her appearance that he or she represents order. This is why his or her clothing and his or her physical appearance has to be maintained in order to meet the expectations of citizens all the time.

The application of the abovementioned theories and methods are likely to support the real effectiveness of police road traffic control.

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### About the Authors

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**Róbert Major**, Dr, associate professor, pol. colonel. National University of Public Service, Faculty of Law Enforcement, Department of Public Safety. E-mail: maior.robet@uni-nke.hu

**Gábor Mészáros**, assistant professor, pol. lieutenant colonel. National University of Public Service, Faculty of Law Enforcement, Department of Public Safety. E-mail: meszaros.oabor@uni-nke.hu

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**Streszczenie.** Jednym z najważniejszych zagadnień, które należy poruszyć jest bezpieczeństwo podróżowania po drogach publicznych zarówno na Węgrzech, jak i w Unii Europejskiej. Autorzy przeprowadzili sondaż w celu zbadania obecnego stanu bezpieczeństwa w ruchu drogowym na Węgrzech. Przedmiotem ich zainteresowania są działania podjęte w zakresie bezpieczeństwa i kontroli ruchu drogowego w minionych latach. Kierowcy pojazdów uważają, że rozporządzenia dotyczące ograniczenia prędkości i nadmiernej prędkości jazdy są mniej zasadne i akceptowalne. Bezwzględne przekroczenie ograniczenia prędkości, znane również jako nadmierna prędkość, znacznie zwiększa ryzyko wypadków, jak również przyczynia się do zwiększenia ich dotkliwości, na co wskazuje zarówno większość z odniesionych w tych wypadkach urazów, jak i liczba ofiar śmiertelnych. Spośród wykroczeń drogowych takich jak nadmierna prędkość, jazda po pijanemu i zastosowanie się do biernych środków bezpieczeństwa w ruchu drogowym, największym problemem jest przekroczenie prędkości. Biorąc pod uwagę liczbę śmiertelnych wypadków drogowych na Węgrzech, stało się oczywiste, że liczba przypadków bezwzględnego przekroczenia prędkości znacznie wzrasta. Nadmierna prędkość odgrywa znaczącą rolę pod względem stopnia dotkliwości wypadku, szczególnie w przypadku niezabezpieczonych podróżnych, pieszych i rowerzystów. Kontrola ruchu drogowego jest elementem wpływającym na świadomość i edukację w zakresie bezpiecznego podróżowania. Policyjne programy kontroli ruchu drogowego i zapobiegania wypadkom mają na celu zmniejszenie liczby ofiar wypadków drogowych.

**Zusammenfassung.** Eine der wichtigsten Fragen, die es zu klären gilt, ist die Sicherheit im öffentlichen Straßenverkehr sowohl in Ungarn als auch in der Europäischen Union. Die Autoren führten eine Umfrage durch, um den aktuellen Stand der Verkehrssicherheit in Ungarn zu untersuchen. Gegenstand ihres Interesses waren die Maßnahmen, die in den vergangenen Jahren auf dem Gebiet der Verkehrssicherheit und der Verkehrssteuerung ergriffen wurden. Die Autofahrer halten die Regelungen zu Tempolimits und Geschwindigkeitsüberschreitungen für weniger legitim und akzeptabel. Absolute Geschwindigkeitsüberschreitung, auch als

Raser bezeichnet, erhöht sowohl das Unfallrisiko als auch die Schwere der Unfälle erheblich, was sich sowohl an den meisten erlittenen Verletzungen als auch an der Zahl der Todesopfer zeigt. Von den Verkehrsdelikten wie Geschwindigkeitsübertretungen, Alkohol am Steuer und passive Sicherheitsmaßnahmen im Straßenverkehr ist die Geschwindigkeitsübertretung das größte Problem. Angesichts der Zahl der tödlichen Verkehrsunfälle in Ungarn wird deutlich, dass die Zahl der absoluten Geschwindigkeitsüberschreitungen deutlich zunimmt. Eben die Geschwindigkeit spielt eine wesentliche Rolle für die Unfallschwere, insbesondere bei ungesicherten Reisenden, Fußgängern und Radfahrern. Die Verkehrssteuerung ist ein Element, das das Bewusstsein und die Aufklärung über sicheres Fahren beeinflusst. Die polizeilichen Verkehrsüberwachungs- und Unfallverhütungsprogramme zielen darauf ab, die Zahl der Verkehrsunfallopfer zu reduzieren.

**Резюме.** Одним из важнейших вопросов, который предстоит рассмотреть, является безопасность движения на дорогах общего пользования, как в Венгрии, так и в Европейском Союзе. Авторы провели исследование с целью изучения нынешнего состояния безопасности дорожного движения в Венгрии. Предметом их интереса являются меры, принятые в последние годы в области обеспечения безопасности дорожного движения и контроля за соблюдением правил дорожного движения. Водители транспортных средств считают правила ограничения и превышения скорости менее легитимными и приемлемыми. Абсолютное превышение ограничения скорости, т.н. превышение скорости, значительно увеличивает риск ДТП, а также их серьезность, о чем свидетельствуют как большое число травм и погибших. Из всех нарушений правил дорожного движения, таких как превышение скорости, управление транспортным средством в нетрезвом состоянии и применение мер пассивной безопасности на дороге, наибольшую проблему представляет именно превышение скорости. Учитывая количество погибших в ДТП на дорогах в Венгрии стало ясно, что количество случаев превышения скорости резко увеличивается. Скорость играет значительную роль с точки зрения серьезности ДТП, особенно для недостаточно защищенных пассажиров, пешеходов и велосипедистов. Контроль за дорожным движением — это элемент, влияющий на сознательность и образование в области безопасного движения. Полицейские программы по управлению дорожным движением и предупреждению дорожно-транспортных происшествий направлены на снижение числа жертв дорожно-транспортных происшествий.

