



To: City Transport, Place Directorate

From: Adrian Davis

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Subject: Essential Evidence on a page: No. 118 Car manufacturers and global road safety

Top line: Vigilance is needed to ensure that road safety policies promoted by organisations with potential financial conflicts of interest are based on sound evidence of effectiveness.

Worldwide, an estimated 1.2 million people are killed in road crashes each year and as many as 50 million are injured.¹ Most of these are in low and middle income countries, and most of the casualties are pedestrians and cyclists. The World Bank believes that a partnership between business, non-governmental organizations, and governments in these countries can deliver substantial road safety improvements and has established the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP) for this purpose.²

The partnership includes the car makers General Motors, Ford, Daimler Chrysler, and Volvo, and the drinks multinationals Bacardi-Martini and United Distillers. However, concern has been raised that companies may only support initiatives that serve their commercial interests, rather than implementing evidence based interventions.³

Researchers examined this concern by conducting an analyses of the frequency of words used in road safety documents from the GRSP and the World Health Organization (WHO).⁴ To do this the researchers quantified the prevalence of road safety terms in the summary report of the World report on road traffic injury prevention prepared by WHO and the World Bank (26,742 words excluding references) and in the combined annual reports (2003–05) of the GRSP (31,548 words). The researchers compiled a glossary of road safety terms that included words for the different categories of road user (pedestrian, cyclist, passenger) and for different types of road safety intervention. Occurrences of the words in the documents and the total word count were made and then divided the total number of occurrences of the relevant words by the total number of words in the document to give the prevalence of each word per 10 000 words.

There were important differences in emphasis between the road safety activities of the GRSP, and those advocated by the World report on road traffic injury prevention by the WHO and the World Bank. Those of the GRSP were less likely to be supported by strong scientific evidence. The WHO's World report on road traffic injury prevention emphasised speed reduction, based on strong evidence, and included words such as speed, speed limits, child restraint, pedestrian, public transport, walking, and cycling with far greater frequency, than the GRSP documents. The GRSP documents were substantially more likely to use the words school, campaign, driver training, and billboard. Such emphasis on education by GRSP is contrary to the available research evidence on effective interventions to reduce road traffic injuries.

¹ WHO, 2004 World report on road traffic injury prevention, Geneva: WHO.

² Global Road Safety Partnership. A global partnership for sustainable improvement of road safety in developing and transition countries. <http://www.grsproadsafety.org/>

³ Mohan D, Roberts I. 2001 Global road safety and the contribution of big business. *British Medical Journal*; 323:648.

⁴ Roberts, I, Wentz, R., Edwards, P. 2006 Car manufacturers and global road safety: a word frequency analysis of road safety documents, *Injury Prevention*, 12: 320-322.