

LE 5 billion losses annually due to car accidents

Achieving all kinds of safety on roads is one of the most important factors that have a positive effect on the progress of the national economy, investment and tourist attraction. Therefore, roads have a great effect on the economic reputation of any country.

According to an expert, promotion of investment and economy of any country needs special roads that guarantee safe transport of goods and passengers, as these are some of the production expenses in most cases.

In this report, we try to highlight the following issues pertaining to roads: their status, vehicles, pedestrians and their importance to the national economy.

A latest statistic by Roads and Bridges Authority with the Ministry of Transport states that the number of annual car accidents reaches 30,000 accidents and with 6,000 deaths, a rate of 25 deaths for every 10,000 vehicles.

The same statistic also declares that the economic losses of these accidents about LE5 billions.

Likewise, another study made by the Crisis Research Unit, Ain Shams University, states that car accidents became the second reason for death cases of 20-40 year people – the age of productivity.

The study also states that car accidents represent 10 % of the hospitals' capacity.

Moreover, the final report issued by the National Center for Social and Criminal Researches states that 16 persons are killed and 82 persons are

injured daily due to car accidents. The total is 30,000 injured in 26,000 car accidents annually. The report also states that more than 80% of these accidents occurred because of drivers' faults, 5% because of defects of roads, 11% because of the explosion of the inner tubes and technical defects and 4% because of weather circumstances.

Artery of Life

Former Minister of Economy, Dr. Mostafa Al Said says, "Transportation is an important factor to economy. It is considered the artery of life. The issue of car accidents differs from the issue of constructing roads.

Therefore, roads must be totally safe and people should feel safety on them. In addition, there must be strict traffic procedures, lighting signs and new administrations for roads.

Dr. Abdul-Hady Al-Naggar, Professor of Law, Faculty of Law, Ain Shams University added, "Roads must be wide enough, safe and free from violation. The good reputation of the economy of any country must be achieved through a set of regulations, laws and behaviors and those who are in charge have to be strict toward those who commit faults.

Though some Arab countries, such as Gulf Countries, have good roads that have widespread services, these roads have no projects while road must be connected with major and minor projects."

Infrastructure

"Road is part of the infrastructure and it is the most important condition of attracting investors together with other conditions," says Professor of Economy, Faculty of Commerce, Ain Shams University, Dr. Al-Sayed Attyah.

"The internal road network is one of the important factors of keeping investments. Without vast, paved and widespread road network, which can connect the locations of production to the places of receipt and shipping of goods in export or import processes, the transportation of goods and individuals will be so difficult," said deputy chief of Investors Division, Federation of Chambers of Commerce, Mr. Adel Al-Ezabi.

"The paved road only is not sufficient unless it is vast enough and has room for the size and weight of vehicles.

Some foreign importers in some of our surrounding countries have many complaints in this regard due to jams of cars loaded with goods, waiting for crossing the areas that have bridges leading to the places of shipping."

Great Suffering

Al-Ezabi adds, "At the beginning of the open-door policy, Egypt had a great suffering due to shortage of roads, network and telecommunications.

Though we can not disregard what has been achieved in this regard since late 1980s up till now, however some roads still need to be widened and most of them need to be repaved and permanent maintenance.

In addition, some roads that lead to some new cities need to be reorganized for achieving more flowing, especially at rush hours."

"A great network of roads has been constructed in Egypt but we need more," said Professor of constructions, Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University, Dr. Milad Hanna.

"I hope we can achieve more progress in connecting our roads with Sudan road networks whether in the east through Al Qusair-Port Sudan Road, Abu Simbel- Wady Halfa road or the road from Assiut through the same way from Darb Al-Arbain to the White Nile and al-Fasher in Sudan."

The construction of these roads needs no great amount of money, for the eastern road is paved except for about 175 km. As for the Abu Simbel- Wady Halfa road, it still needs about 60 km to be paved. However, the third road is long and needs a huge amount of money, Hanna said.

Special Specifications

Former Arab Contractors Chairman Ismail Othman says land roads need to be paved with special means to alleviate burdens on loads by cars and trucks. Nowadays, transporting big containers by trucks requires roads with special specifications like what is done in the developed countries where there are roads for trucks.

He adds that Eng. Othman Ahmad Othman (late owner and chairman of Arab Contractors) used to advise him, saying, "If we want to promote investment and economic status of a place, we have to pave roads with special specifications."

All roads, like Cairo-Alexandria Road, now are constructed by private sector companies and need huge amounts of money, he said.

However, head of Exporter Division with Federation of Chambers of Commerce, Hilal Shita has a different view, as he confirms that the worst thing in Egypt is its asphalted roads.

"Now, no longer have we seen asphalted roads that can endure loads of huge trucks without holes in the road resulting from heavy loads."

Hilal added that bad asphalted roads have a negative effect on car consumption, spare parts and fuel. They also delay the process of transporting and delivering of goods, which is a big challenge that faces exportation and local consumption.

Hilal demands State monitoring bodies to supervise road bids and follow up implementation to prevent fraud and manipulation.

He also urges punishment on the contractors who do not comply with the sound road construction specification.

Former Minister of Housing and Construction Eng. Hasaballah al-Kafrawy says if roads are paved and have silk asphalt - as he puts it – as well as all other required services such as traffic signs and lights, this has no importance as long as official bodies are inaccessible.

Investment and economy need a sensitive, transparent and pure atmosphere. Whenever this atmosphere loses clearness and transparency, investment and economy will be so weak even if we have soft, silk-like roads, al-Kafrawy said.

Investment infrastructure is not just asphalted roads, but rather official bodies, agencies and laws with which investor deal, for the relation of these bodies with investors must be based on amicability not animosity and suspicion.

Three Factors

Professor of Roads and Traffic Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University, Dr. Mohamed Rashad al-Matly objects to the argument that roads negative effect on economy. He argues that car accidents are responsible for that, as this is the correct view.

The causes of this problem are three factors: roads, vehicles and pedestrians, al-Matly said.

He states that many studies on car accidents in Egypt confirm that drivers are the reason for accidents due to discarding traffic rules not their inefficiency. This is traced back to the behaviors of the Egyptian society.

He also points out that some roads have some design defects, especially in the curves of bridges and roads. Likewise, there are no guiding signs, thus causing many accidents.

Al-Matly also argues that accidents caused by vehicles are few, concentrated particularly in the misuse of tires.

The number of car accidents in Egypt compared to the population is very low comparing to other states.

Al-Matly calls for the establishment of an authority for following up and analyzing car accidents, as is the case in some other countries. He also asks Traffic Accident Center with the General Department of Traffic to develop its role, noting that it is not reasonable that there are 6,000 deaths and about 22,000 injures of car accidents annually in Egypt.

However, these data are not accurate, because they are conducted and taken by police stations not the Traffic Accident Center.

The reason for car accidents is attributed to the absence of an integrated strategy for planning and maintaining roads, said Professor of Road Engineering at Ain Sham University's Faculty of Engineering Essam Sharaf. Highroads, for example, are in need of essential requirements and services, as their budgets are low, he noted.

Dr. Sharaf demands the establishment of a separate department for road policy management and planning. This department must have all required powers and resources as well as clear aims. There should also be co-ordination between all competent bodies for achieving traffic safety.

The passage of vehicles, especially trucks, on the high roads has to be studied in order to construct new roads in compliance with special technical specifications.

License

Trucks should be given specific licenses, according to the nature of the material they carry and degree of its danger, said a study by advisor to People's Assembly Industry and Energy Committee **Dr. Nader Riad**, who is also

Chairman of the Industry and Energy Committee with the Cairo-based Arab-German Chamber of Commerce.

Riad also points out that these licenses will help keep safety and quality of the transported materials and will prevent dangers, accidents and environmental pollution.

In his study, **Riad** points out that ordinary trucks are not suitable for transporting huge containers, which are difficult to fix technically.

This may result in the lack of safety and may expose the driver and those who are with him to danger, as the container may move when the truck brakes or collides.

The transported materials may be damaged, the road may be broken down and effort and money may be wasted. Dr. Riad suggests the issuance of a specified license for trucks, especially for transporting huge containers.

As for transporting liquids and gases in tanks, **Dr. Riad** classifies these liquids and gases according to their kinds and degree of danger. Transporting liquids and gases requires supplying the truck with certain tools for keeping their quality on one hand, achieving safety conditions and preventing environmental pollution on the other hand.

The transportation process shall be carried out through a special license that determines the itinerary of a truck, he said.

Radioactive objects should be transported in special trucks with specified licenses for this purpose. Security procedures shall be taken during transportation. Itinerary and time of passage should be determined for these trucks – a license for each transportation process.

Moreover, **Dr. Riad** states that these procedures will help keep quality of the transported objects, whether materials, production requirements or imported or exported objects. In addition, these procedures guarantee safety and prevent environmental pollution.

They also help avoid disasters and road breakdown. The difficulties in traffic and the bad technical status of most means of transportation lead to daily disorder of some of these means. Consequently, they stop and break down the whole road for some time.

This continuous waste of time and effort result in rising financial, temporal, psychological and nervous costs, which afflict owners, drivers and passengers.

Likewise, difficulties in traffic waste more time and effort than suggested, thus decreasing the number of daily travels by these means as well as misuse of them.

Mr. Nazmy Muhammad, general director of public relations and media, Misr Travel Company says the criterion of progress of any country is linked to its roads.

He agrees with the previous views, stating that car accidents are attributed to three causes: vehicles, drivers and roads.

Mr. Nazmy demands that all vehicles, especially tourist ones, should be subjected to precise examination and should obtain tourist licenses from the competent authorities that issue the tourist licenses. Moreover, these authorities have the right to cancel the license in case the car violates the rules.

As for the drivers, they should take special courses about the ethics of traffic. In addition, they should know the road network well, specially the tourist ones that exist in all governorates.

They will be subjected to periodical physical and psychological examinations to check their bodily and healthy fitness.

Mr. Nazmy Yusuf points out that Egypt held recently a big conference, which comes to some important and binding recommendations concerning dealing with roads and the recurrent car accidents.

It recommended the use of the best means of repairing these roads according to the international standards of construction, services and the required signs for drivers.

The same will be the case with the fines and penalties against those who breach traffic rules.