



## interview with **Anna Ferrer**

Ex-Director of the Directorate-General  
for Traffic's National Road Safety  
Observatory



Anna Ferrer was born in Barcelona on 29 September 1957. She stayed there until 2004, when she moved to Madrid to work for the Directorate-General for Traffic.

Trained as a pedagogue, she studied at *Universidad Autónoma* of Barcelona and got a degree from the University of Barcelona. From 1982 she was a civil servant at Barcelona City Council, where she began working on informal educational subjects in teams and services dedicated to childhood and youth. Later on, she dealt with subjects related to the training of social and sociocultural educators, within the field of staff training. There, at the end of the 1980s, she came into contact with new trends in the management of public policies. She coordinated training courses in public management at the ESADE Business School, where she herself also specialised in project management.

Interested in everything involved in policy design and information, she began to work with drivers at the start of the 1990s. In 1991 she joined Barcelona City Council's Public Highways section, documenting municipal street services activity: cleaning, traffic and maintenance. She managed information and data and made recommendations. She produced statistics and managed multisectoral projects like road safety, which tied in with the needs of a city like Barcelona when it was preparing for the 1992 Olympic Games.

In 2004 she joined the recently created National Road Safety Observatory, serving as its Director until 2012 when it ceased to exist.

# *“Insurance has been one of the main beneficiaries of the reduction in the number of accidents”*

During the eight-year life of the Directorate-General for Traffic’s National Road Safety Observatory, Spain succeeded in significantly reducing the number of road accident fatalities - down from over 5,000 a year to over 2,000. A system designed to convince citizens, who are increasingly aware of the problem, that rules are there to be obeyed, together with a series of reforms with respect to penalties and surveillance, have produced these results, which cannot be satisfactory while there is a single fatality. A lot of small things still have to be done.

## **How did you get into the world of mobility?**

When I started working in Barcelona City Council’s Public Highways department at the start of the 1990s, I came into contact with the world of mobility through the information systems I managed. In Public Highways, I documented mobility policies and action plans through the information systems. All this brought me closer to road safety policy, which is necessarily cross-cutting and has to fit in with the information systems. That was how I met Pere Navarro, who joined the Barcelona City Council in 2000 to promote the Mobility Pact. His objective within the City Council was to design a mobility model for the city in which all sectors participated under a minimum of common agreements. When he was appointed Director-General for Traffic in 2004, one of his priorities was to promote information and participation. It was then that he called on me to join the National Road Safety Observatory.





**In 2003 we had 128 fatalities per million in road accidents. Today the figure is 59**

**This year the National Road Safety Observatory (ONSV<sup>1</sup>) ceased to exist as such, and with it went your job. How do you feel about that?**

I have very positive memories of the work we did. We made a good team, with fantastic people who worked very hard, contributed all their knowledge and chose to go into areas they did not know. The truth is that I came for two years in 2004 and stayed eight, which was fortunate because, with a wonderful group of people, we were able to organise a work that combined planning and knowledge of key statistics. We continued building the team as needs arose. The more progress we made with road safety management, the more we knew, but at the same time, we were aware of what we still needed to know.

**When the ONSV disappeared, where were the functions it performed moved to?**

They were split between two areas. One for planning and the other for statistics.

**What were the ONSV's objectives when it was created in 2004?**

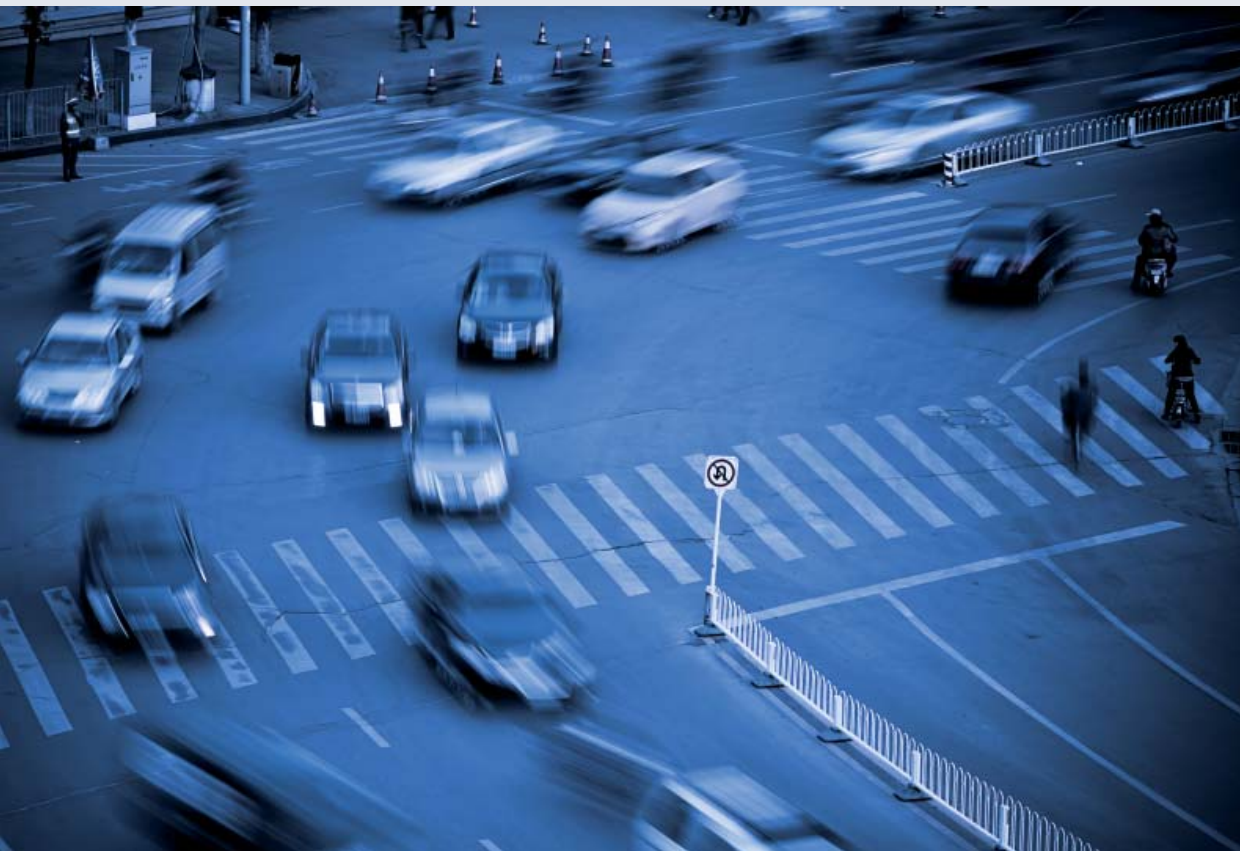
International institutions were saying that, in order for road safety policies to work, there

had to be multisectoral objectives and action plans involving all private and public players. It was also vital for information to be released continuously. When I arrived, there was a Statistics Department and a Road Safety Council in which the conditions allowing all the players involved to be called together were met. A report was issued which was an aggregate of initiatives from each of the institutions or departments working on road safety, but we made a change to it, because strategy is not the sum of initiatives but must be structured on the basis of a number of objectives that have to be set out beforehand with regard to the problems one wishes to solve. This resulted in the action plan and the list of activities. In the end, the tools were the same but with a different focus. The aim was to reduce the number of fatalities.

**Back then it was normal to talk about 5,000 deaths a year from road accidents. What was the starting point?**

The statistical series built up over the last ten years gave this figure, which held steady, and when we compared it with statistics from other European countries it became clear

<sup>1</sup> Observatorio Nacional de Seguridad Vial.



One of the main problems we had in Spain in 2004 was that only 60% of drivers obeyed the rules

that there was room for improvement. The other thing we needed to do was ascertain what the main problems were, because that was where we needed to focus our search for solutions. One of the main problems we had in Spain was that the rules were not being obeyed. For example, we knew that we had to wear seatbelts, but only 60% of users had them fastened. And then there were the motorcyclists who failed to wear crash helmets. We saw that helmet use and seatbelts were areas in which action was required, along with speed and alcohol.

#### **Did the ONSV advise the Directorate-General for Traffic on this subject?**

The ONSV documented problems and set out priorities. It helped to establish international benchmarking. It analysed how the problems had been solved in other countries, though then it was those in charge of the sub-departments of the Directorate-General for Traffic (DGT) who had to implement the solutions. With speed cameras, for example, the ONSV identified speed as a problem in Spain, but it was Traffic Management and Planning Regulations that drew up and implemented the Speed Camera Plan.

#### **What phases did the ONSV go through following its establishment in 2004?**

The ONSV had three different areas. The first was that of **sources of information**. The DGT received accident reports from the police, but had to improve on that information by incorporating data from health or forensic sources. The other important pillar comprised indicators - for example, what was happening in the street and on the road. We knew how many accident victims were not wearing seatbelts, but how many of all those on the roads were wearing them? At the European level, we knew how many people on the roads were not wearing seatbelts. What the ONSV did was analyse European standards of analysis in relation to the essential factors for reducing the number of accidents such as speed, seatbelts, helmets, alcohol and drugs, and apply them. We also compiled information related to the activity: what investment was being made in infrastructure or how many fines were being imposed, for example.

The second part was that relating to **planning**, which was based on data and always had an interest in both areas being together, because they provided continuous feedback.



**The subject of motorcycles has been the one most discussed because of media coverage, with the involvement of manufacturers, users and insurers, amongst others**

In order to know what to do, you have to know how something has happened. It is advisable to investigate how something has happened, which is why information needs to be received continuously.

The third key aspect is **involvement** of main players in order to identify which actions are adequate. Coordination between ministries or the support of civil society, because it is not a case of approving or proposing but rather of discussing the problems. The best-known subject, because of its media coverage, has been that of motorcycles, where each of those involved, be they manufacturers, users or insurers, were dealing with the problem of a growing number of accidents and had to seek a solution. This generated a valuable debate, with each party legitimately defending its interests and also blaming each other. But we continued with this valuable development until everyone ended up contributing imaginative solutions as a result of a coordinated effort.

**So what bodies did the ONSV involve in the search for information and when it came to coordinating the solutions?**

Practically, all the Ministries, Regional Governments and City Councils were invited. But I specifically wish to emphasise all the

powers in relation to infrastructure. The Ministry of Development manages a small part of the road network, only 15%; the rest is the responsibility of other Administrations. For road safety, this dispersal is very complex in order to ensure improvements. Besides the Ministry of Development, the Ministry of Health took part because of its involvement with accident victims with regards to rescue, recovery and drivers' physical and psychological fitness. The Education authorities were also involved through everything related to teaching in schools. The Ministry of Labour took part because of its involvement with accidents at work and on the way to and from work. The Ministry of Transport was involved as far as driving professionals were concerned, as was the Ministry of Justice, which has a special prosecutor's office for road safety offences. It has been quite a development, and that is because road safety is achieved through process and project methodology and not only through content. We constructed a procedure for identifying the problem and creating a solution to it. Everyone spoke from their own perspective: the Civil Guard, the prosecutor's office, professionals, taxi drivers and lorry drivers. This was a quite considerable development representing a change in State administration.



### **Do you think that road safety is a priority of any Government?**

It has to be, because it is a question of citizens' quality of life. Our children are driving now and are less afraid of doing so.

### **How have PR campaigns consolidated the change in mentality of all those involved?**

There has been much more networking, carried out by those involved. What the Directorate-General for Traffic has succeeded in doing is raising private and public awareness of the fact that road safety is everyone's responsibility. Many companies are worried about reducing the number of their workers' driving accidents.

Let's just say that it is a whole set of small things, of actions, that are influential in shaping a new reality. When, a few years ago, there were conferences to explain how companies could reduce their accident rates, we were not able to give examples. It was the multinationals who explained what they were doing, because they had been told what to do by their parent companies. That has now changed.

### **Talking about results, when the EU stated that it was necessary to halve road traffic mortality in 2010, can you confirm that this goal was achieved?**

Certainly, at least in Spain, and was even exceeded, but in other countries it was not. Perhaps because it started from lower positions and it was easier for us to reduce that ratio than it was for other European countries.

### **Why? Other countries are much more regulated and tend to have much stricter compliance with the standards. Maybe they are more educated.**

Because we had more room for improvement. As far as the population was concerned, a Spaniard was twice as likely to die in a road accident as a Dutchman. The fact was the same, so we identified the differences and saw whether we could get closer to reaching the statistics for Holland. Paradoxically, in Spain we recorded 128 deaths per million inhabitants in 2003, whereas in Holland this parameter was 63. Spain currently has a value lower than Holland did then, having reached 59 fatalities per million inhabitants.

### **Has the policy of imposing penalties had any influence?**

This policy exists everywhere. If a British citizen drives after consuming alcohol, he will be arrested by the police and will go to prison, just as he would in Sweden or France. Here, the case goes before a judge. And it is not only on the roads; many successes are being achieved in the cities through the raising of awareness. I remember talking to mayors or city councillors who would say: "How can I fine my neighbour's son?" But the change in society that has occurred now requires that mayors take measures. One of the things that the World Bank is promoting for developing countries when they want to tackle the subject of road safety is for them to look for an organisation that coordinates the entire strategy and look for someone who will lead and put a face to the job. In the cities it is the city council, the mayor and the city councillor.

### **What still has to be done?**

The most important infrastructure in Spain has already been built. The quality of the cars on the road in Spain is improving despite the crisis. Driver behaviour has changed dramatically and the focus should now be on groups: companies, motorcyclists and pedestrians. One of the reasons for the good result of the measures adopted has been the loop created

**The World Bank advises developing countries, once they decide to tackle the subject of road safety, to assign all the coordination of the strategy to a single organisation**

## Road Safety Lessons

On 11 May of this year, the *El País* newspaper published an article by Pere Navarro, Director-General for Traffic until February 2012, which under the title "Some road safety lessons" reflected on the importance of mobilising society and making it obey the law in order to achieve a significant reduction in the number of road accidents and the number of deaths they caused.

In the review that he offered since his arrival at the Directorate-General for Traffic in 2004, he warned of the poor level of awareness among the Spanish with regard to the number of deaths on the road: 5,400 in 2003. And in order to raise awareness of the fact that there was a problem, it was necessary to highlight this figure while producing a discourse on road safety and trying to ensure that everyone felt comfortable and citizens saw it as reasonable. "The discourse was prepared with victims' associations and essentially says that accidents are avoidable."

For the discourse to be more than just rhetoric, it was accompanied by measures which now seem normal to us: points system for driving licences; breathalyser checks; speed cameras; increase in police personnel; and amendment of the Penal Code. Navarro explained that every time a measure was announced there was debate, and this was good for road safety. "Contrary to what might appear, the aim of road safety policy was not to reduce the number of accidents but to change drivers' habits and behaviour, making them safer", he said.

The media were necessary allies in this task of changing behaviour. Civil society had understood this, and the reduction achieved in the number of road accident fatalities was a success for everyone. Pere Navarro's optimistic view was that, in the end, the secret of success appeared simple. It involved ensuring that the law was obeyed and persevering, but taking account of what was the right direction to take.



between information and action. When you find that almost a quarter of all fatalities are as a result of people being run over, you study the problem to see who has to act, how and when. Specifically, you look into whether there is a problem of speed on the road or in the streets, which cases are lethal and in what situation people survive. There is still a lot to be done, without any need for major investment.

### **What has been the role of motor insurers in all this process?**

The debate on accidents has been one that has corroborated the development recorded. Insurance has been one of the main beneficiaries of the reduction in the number of accidents. Some insurers supported the proposal and have a role in consolidating positive driving behaviour. Some companies are doing this more than others by offering discounts to encourage positive driving behaviour, such as not getting speeding fines or not having had problems with alcohol. Or services giving notification of fines, or the black box for young people. The future will be characterised by initiatives of this kind. Accident rates will continue to fall provided we all act, because now there are no big problems to tackle. There are only small things that have to accompany this combination of initiatives.

### **Does the Directorate-General for Traffic have appropriate means to implement these policies? For instance, is the number of active speed cameras on the roads sufficient?**

Pressure and information have to be fine-tuned. Speaking of speed cameras, for example, in France the pressure has become excessive. You have to inform citizens and also try to convince them. It is true that the subject of speed is the most complicated, because the collective imagination has spent many years promoting speed as a positive value of individuality and freedom. The system has to remind people that rules must be obeyed, educating children and adults as they do in Sweden. It is a very good idea which should be passed on. But it is not only a question of citizens. Half of the deaths caused by road accidents in cities are the result of people being run over. And since it is difficult to change attitudes, the best thing is to get the rest of the system to protect pedestrians, for example by changing the design of cities to make them more for pedestrians and less for cars.