

EDITORIAL

DRIVING ETIQUETTE EDUCATION TO REDUCE ROAD TRAFFIC CRASHES

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A prediction by the World Health Organisation, documented in the Editorial of the Sri Lanka Journal of Forensic Medicine, Science and Law in 2018¹, that road traffic injuries would be the eighth leading cause of death in 2030, has become true in less than half that time. As detailed in the *Lancet* Series on Road Safety, road traffic injuries (RTIs) were the eighth leading cause of death worldwide in 2022, accounting for 1.35 million deaths each year².

In Sri Lanka, 22153 accidents caused 2732 deaths in 2025³. This represents an increase of one RTI-related death per day, compared to 2024, which had 2359 deaths. In the first six months of 2026, the number of fatalities has risen by 119, compared to the same period in 2025.

In order to curb this increase, in recent times the police have increased the fines and punishments imposed for violation of road rules. While this is a step in the right direction, driving etiquette, which is not enforceable, also needs to be addressed.

Driving etiquette is the collection of unwritten rules and common courtesies that promote smooth, safe traffic flow. It goes beyond legal requirements to ensure mutual respect, accident prevention, and stress-free navigation for all road users. These principles revolve around communication, predictability, and sharing space fairly. In addition, it actually helps the movement of traffic. For example, you are in a line of bumper-to-bumper, slow-moving vehicles. You see a vehicle on a side road on the left, waiting to cross the main road and turn right where the traffic is free-flowing.

If you courteously wait and create a gap for it to go, he goes on his way faster. Do you get even a second delayed? No. Within a minute after he has gone on his way, you have again reached the bumper of the vehicle in front of you. A roundabout is meant to create free-flowing traffic – if the rule of giving way to the person on the roundabout (on the right) is followed. However, if the way in front of you on the roundabout is blocked, moving in will only block the exit path of vehicles on your right, which will cause the entire roundabout to become gridlocked; causing delay to everyone, and increasing the congestion. In a situation where two lanes merge into one, the flow of traffic is faster if the vehicles in the two lanes merge like a ‘zip’ – one from each lane alternatively.

Expressways are a relatively recent driving experience for Sri Lankan drivers. Those who have driven in overseas countries are probably familiar with driving on an expressway. However, the vast majority of those who drive on the expressway have not had the experience. On the expressway, driving significantly slower than the speed of the majority of vehicles, results in increased accidents. Therefore, a good practice is to go with the traffic flow. Enforcing a minimum speed limit may become necessary. The overtaking lane should only be used for overtaking and then should get back into the left lane. The three-second rule should be employed actively on the expressway due to the much higher speeds.

Giving adequate signal time and checking mirrors before switching lanes is important. A fast-moving vehicle in the right lane will not

expect, and not be prepared for, a slower vehicle in the left lane pulling out in front of it. The on ramp should be used for accelerating to highway speed. Going to the end at a slower speed than the other vehicles travelling past and attempting to merge should not be done. In addition, those who are on the left lane can move to the right lane when they see an approaching vehicle on the on ramp, to enable a smooth merge. When exiting, the speed ought to be maintained and only once on the off ramp, slowing down should commence. Slowing down prior to getting on the off ramp may result in a rear end collision with a vehicle travelling at a constant speed (using cruise control) in the left lane.

Driver training schools do not educate, nor train, for driving on the expressway. Since it is not feasible to test drivers applying for the driving licence on the expressway, a simulator can be used for this purpose. The candidate will need to drive a specific number of hours and undergo a test on the simulator, prior to the road driving test.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

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