

# Don't Dance on the Road: Advice on Navigating Kampala's Transport Infrastructure

By Caroline Knowles,  
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## Programme Highlight

'Don't dance on the road' is the advice of a six-year-old pupil at the Bat Valley School in Kampala. The class lists further dangerous road behaviours – fighting, playing, and pushing friends – all of which could result in 'missing life' as one little girl rather poignantly put it. Looking both ways before crossing and using the zebra crossing outside of the school are now part of their thinking.

This is particularly important in a school where a large proportion of the children live in a nearby informal settlement (slum) in poor, sometimes child-headed, families as parents move around the city from one precarious source of survival to another. Family circumstances mean that there is rarely an adult available to walk even the youngest children to school on Kampala's dangerously congested streets.

## Changing Behaviour

Developing child road safety behaviour is a project intervention designed to counter the traffic accident, injury and mortality rate on Kampala's roads. Steve Cinderby of York University's Stockholm Environment Institute and his team lead it.<sup>1</sup> I am visiting the school with Alon Mwesigawa, the Kampala team's research assistant from Makerere University<sup>2</sup> who has been working with the children alongside a local creative team. Children play with toy cars on roads they

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<sup>1</sup> *Instituting Creative Methodological Innovations for Inclusive, Sustainable Transport Planning* funded by the British Academy's Cities and Infrastructure Programme.

<sup>2</sup> There is a parallel project in Nairobi.

have drawn and the lessons they learn go up on the classroom wall as posters providing daily road safety reminders.

## **Road Traffic Accidents**

In sub Saharan Africa, more people die from traffic accidents than from infectious diseases. Pedestrian and motorists' accident rates in Kampala are particularly shocking. Uganda is a top country for road traffic deaths at 28.9 per 100,000 of population, an average of ten deaths a day, predominantly in Kampala with pedestrians bearing the brunt of injury and death, and children over represented in the casualty and mortality figures. A more systematic intervention by the Kampala City Government is needed to address what is clearly a structural problem in urban road infrastructure, but changing individual behaviour is a step forward. Investment and road planning are long-term issues that require leadership from the city government.

## **Funding the Zebra Crossing**

The road safety intervention with two schools in central Kampala is showing important changes. The first is the zebra crossing outside one of the schools; the second school already has one provided by parents. The Kampala Capital City Authority struggles with infrastructure. They do better on water provision and are targeting waste management. Both are in private hands and access especially for poor communities is expensive and unsatisfactory. But traffic infrastructure – while acknowledged as an important issue – is slowly becoming a priority, boosted by the research. Zebra crossings are for these reasons left to individual schools and businesses to finance and install.

## **Painting the Zebra Crossing**

Bat Valley School cannot afford a zebra crossing – it survives on slender resources contributed by government and impoverished parents. The British Academy-funded project supplied the zebra crossing - impact in stripes. Alon and the team painted it on the road outside the school on a Sunday when roads are less busy. Of course, not all motorised traffic takes it seriously – attitudes and behaviour take time to change – so the team plan to experiment with a 3D zebra crossing, which gives the visual impression of it rising from the road a few inches to look like speed bumps to approaching motorists.

## **Crossing the Road Differently**

The project's second impact is on the ways in which the children think about crossing the road and the kinds of activities that should or should not take place on the road. These are difficult lessons to learn. There is little designated play space to which the children have access. Because they live in cramped informal settlements most of their activities take place in public space. But they are learning fast – don't dance on the road!

*Caroline Knowles is Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths University of London and Director of the British Academy's Cities & Infrastructure programme. Caroline writes about migration and circulation of material objects – some of the social forces constituting globalisation. She is particularly interested in cities, having done research in London, Hong Kong, Beijing, Fuzhou, Addis Ababa, Kuwait City and Seoul.*



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## Traffic jam in Kampala

**Image credit:**  
Alon Mwesigawa



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## School children waiting at the zebra crossing

**Image credit:**  
Alon Mwesigawa





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## Teaching road safety to children

**Image credit:**  
**Alon Mwesigawa**



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## Children crossing the street

**Image credit:**  
**Alon Mwesigawa**