

## PRESS RELEASE

June 2020

### Report to the Flemish Parliament

#### *Tackling dangerous points for better road safety*

*With its approach to dangerous points, Flemish government is aiming for victim-free traffic by 2050. The historic programme, in which 800 dangerous points would be tackled in 5 years, will only be fully implemented 22 years after the start at a cost of approximately one billion euros. Since 2018, Flemish government has adopted a new approach: it annually publishes a dynamic list of dangerous points detected that year. The 2021 dynamic list contained 313 dangerous points: 101 new locations and 212 locations that were already on previous lists. In the 4 years of dynamic operation, 580 unique dangerous points were detected, of which 232 points were under construction or implemented by the end of 2021. The dynamic operation cost is unclear. During the entire implementation period, government did little monitoring or evaluation, so that there is no certainty about the value for money.*

#### **Introduction**

Since 2001, Flanders has been shaping its road safety policy in successive policy plans. The targets have been systematically tightened up, but the recent Road Safety Plan (RSP) 2021 lowers targets for 2025 and 2030 (respectively 25% fewer victims and 158 road deaths). The successive RSPs have been created without evaluation of the previous plans and their objectives have never been achieved. In 2000, on Flemish roads 871 people were killed and 6,334 injured. In 2020, those figures have already fallen to 254 deaths and 2,048 seriously injured, but achieving the ultimate goal of Vision Zero by 2050 will still be a major challenge. Although the social cost of road accidents decreases each year, parallel to the decrease of the number of road casualties, a recent study by Vias estimates the cost at 5.4 billion euros for 2020 (including minor injuries). In 2021, the minister set up a new structure in which the Department of Mobility and Public Works was assigned the directing role. The Agency for Roads and Traffic (ART) remains responsible for policy implementation, but no longer has a structural input in policy preparation and evaluation.

#### **Historical dangerous points programme**

In 2002, Flemish government decided to eliminate 800 dangerous points in 5 years with a budget of 500 million euros. At the end of 2021, 23 dangerous points had not yet been eliminated, one of them a top 50 most dangerous points. For 199 locations, i.e. 1 in 4 of the dangerous points, minor interventions (such as road markings or traffic lights) have been chosen instead of an infrastructural approach (such as a roundabout or tunnel). The complete completion of the historic programme is planned for the end of 2024, more than 22 years after its start.

The exact cost of the dangerous points programme is unknown, but according to the available data, infrastructure cost will amount to at least 975 million euros, almost double

the amount originally foreseen. The lack of reliable data doesn't allow cost control assessment.

The entire historical dangerous points programme implementation period (2002-present) saw only limited monitoring. Flemish government had only one programme effect evaluation carried out, halfway through the programme, and minor interventions were not included. Evaluation conclusions confirmed the usefulness of the dangerous points programme, but also indicated that further research was needed, especially into the added value of type solutions. A final evaluation never took place.

### Dynamic dangerous points operation

In 2018, Flemish government started a new approach to dangerous points. By drawing up a dynamic dangerous points list every year and working with quick wins, government wants to tackle dangerous points more quickly. The scientific basis for this approach is minimal. The government formulates few concrete objectives about the dynamic list itself, neither about the number of points to be tackled, nor about the available budget. The most recent list for 2021 contained 313 dangerous points: 101 new locations and 212 locations already on previous lists. Since 2018, the ART has drawn up 4 dynamic lists, as a result of which a total of 580 unique dangerous points were detected. Of these, 232 dangerous points (40%) have the status of *work in progress* or *implemented*, of which only 125 had been addressed by the end of 2020. Half of the dangerous points occurred only once, while the other half were more persistent and occurred over several years. Considering the available budget and personnel capacity, it is not realistic that all 580 dangerous points will have been addressed within a reasonable time frame. Nevertheless, the ART intends to address all detected points in due course, which means that the dynamic effect is rather limited. Moreover, the prioritization of dangerous points mainly focuses on speed, while persistent points should take precedence over one-off points.

The ART does not monitor the budgetary settlement of the dynamic operation in a detailed manner, nor has it insight into the total expenditure on road safety infrastructure. From 2018 to 2020, barely 92 million euros would have been committed for the dangerous points on the dynamic list. This indicates that the budget is more limited than the one for the historical programme.

### Response from the Minister of Mobility and Public Works

The Minister agreed with the Court's conclusions and recommendations. She defended the dynamic operation and the policy choice for quick wins. The minister also undertook to thoroughly evaluate both the historical programme and the dynamic operation.

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### Information for the press

The Court of Audit exerts an external control on the financial operations of the Federal State, the Communities, the Regions and the provinces. It contributes to improving public governance by transmitting to the parliamentary assemblies, to the managers and to the audited services any useful and reliable information resulting from a contradictory examination. As a collateral body of the Parliament, the Court performs its missions independently of the authorities it controls.

The audit report on the *Tackling dangerous points for better road safety* has been sent to the Flemish Parliament. The full version and this press release can be found on the Court's website: [www.courtfaudit.be](http://www.courtfaudit.be).