

Seat Belts Save Lives: AAC’s Enduring Commitment to Road Safety in Sri Lanka



Dhammika Attygalle, President, Automobile Association of Ceylon.

A major collision involving eleven vehicles on Sri Lanka’s Southern Expressway in September 2026 demonstrated the life-saving importance of seat belts. The

incident also highlighted the Automobile Association of Ceylon’s (AAC) longstanding advocacy for stronger road safety regulations, responsible driving, and public awareness.

On September 21, 2026, a collision at the Gelanigama and Dodangoda interchanges involved two buses and several other vehicles. Thirteen people, including eight schoolchildren, were hospitalized, with no fatalities or serious injuries reported. According to Deputy Inspector General of Police W. P. J. Senadheera, the schoolchildren were wearing seat belts, which helped prevent serious injuries.

The accident occurred just one day after expanded expressway seat belt regulations came into full enforcement, making seat belt use compulsory for seated occupants, subject to applicable provisions.

For AAC, this reflected years of sustained advocacy for stronger passenger protection and compliance with safety regulations.

A milestone came in December 2010, when AAC facilitated a visit by Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile (FIA) President Jean Todt, who advocated for compulsory seat belt regulations. Mandatory regulations were subsequently introduced in 2011. His second visit in May 2014 emphasized effective enforcement and greater public awareness.

Under President Dhammika Attygalle, supported by Secretary Devapriya Hettiarachchi, Road Safety and Projects Sector Chairman Prasanna De Zoysa, and the Executive Committee, AAC continued its advocacy through policy engagement, education, and collaboration with authorities.

Its initiatives have addressed pedestrian protection, motorcycle safety, speeding, railway crossing accidents, child passenger safety, and vehicle roadworthiness. Campaigns including Motorcyclist – Safer Ride for All, Don’t Hit & Run!, Helmets for Kids, and Vehicle Testing Can Save Lives demonstrate its comprehensive approach.

AAC has consistently advocated mandatory rear-seat belt use. In November 2020, representatives presented proposals on rear-seat passenger protection and child-restraint legislation to then-Minister of Transport Gamini Lokuge.

Expanded expressway seat belt regulations, introduced in September 2025 and fully enforced on September 20, 2026, marked an important advancement in passenger

safety.

To support this transition, AAC collaborated with the Road Development Authority and the Sri Lanka Police Traffic Division. On September 14, 2026, AAC handed over specially designed seat-belt safety hanging tags and stickers for distribution at expressway entry points.

The Southern Expressway accident reinforced the importance of sustained advocacy, enforcement, and responsible road behavior. While road safety is a collective national responsibility, AAC’s contribution remains significant.

Through its FIA partnership and engagement with national authorities, AAC continues to promote a stronger road safety culture in Sri Lanka.

The message remains simple yet powerful: seat belts save lives, and every journey demands responsibility.