

# Lake County RECORD-BEE

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## California among states with greatest number of accidents involving older drivers

By Staff Reports

WASHINGTON >> While the number of older Americans continues to grow at a significant rate, the number of older drivers involved or killed in fatal traffic crashes is growing even faster, finds a new report from TRIP. With older Americans leading more mobile and active lifestyles than previous generations, it is critical that the nation adopt traffic safety improvements that will make our roads and highways safer not only for older drivers, but for all drivers.

The report, "Preserving the Mobility and Safety of Older Americans," was released Tuesday by TRIP, a national non-profit transportation research group based in Washington, D.C. According to the report, nearly four million licensed drivers in California are 65 or older (highest in U.S.) In 2016, 554 people were killed in California crashes that involved at least one driver 65 or older (3rd in the U.S.).

The TRIP report details states in the top 20 in the number of traffic fatalities involving drivers 65 or older, the increase in fatalities involving drivers 65 or over from 2012 to 2016, the number and proportion of licensed drivers 65 and older, increases in licensed drivers 65 and older from 2012 to 2016, the increase in fatalities involving at least one driver 65 and older from 2012 to 2016, and the number of drivers 65 and older killed in crashes.

According to the TRIP report, an estimated 46 million Americans are 65 or older, accounting for 15 percent of the total population. By 2060, the number of Americans 65 and older will more than double and their proportion of the total population will reach 24 percent. In the last decade, the number of licensed drivers 65 and older increased 38 percent and the proportion of licensed drivers 65 and older rose from 15 percent to 19 percent.

Older Americans are more mobile and active than ever and want to maintain that lifestyle for as long as possible. Among those 65 and older, 90 percent of travel takes place in a private vehicle and 79 percent live in car-dependent suburban and rural communities. The quality of life of older Americans is closely tied to their level of mobility.

"As transportation agencies work to reduce fatalities and serious injuries among older drivers, we are able to implement safety improvements that assist all road users," said Rudy Malfabon, director of the Nevada

Department of Transportation and chair of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials Committee on Highway Traffic Safety. "Wider lane striping, larger sign lettering, and more prominent milepost signage are just a few of the strategies that benefit older road users as well as all motorists and first responders. These efforts help us move toward our vision of zero traffic fatalities."

Older drivers face a number of challenges on the road. Their higher instance of fatalities is partly attributable to physical fragility that makes surviving a crash less likely than for younger drivers. While they tend to be more cautious and avoid risks on the road, older drivers may face physical challenges that make driving more difficult, including diminished eyesight, reaction time, cognitive ability and muscle dexterity.

"Better roads mean safer roads and since California has the largest population of drivers 65 or older, safety improvements to California's crumbling and tired transportation infrastructure are mission critical," said Gary Passmore, President, Congress of California Seniors. "This study clearly demonstrates the importance updating and modernizing California's transportation systems has in saving lives."

Older Americans who cease or limit their driving still have options available for maintaining their mobility, though some may come with challenges and drawbacks. Transit systems can benefit older Americans, though robust transit options may not be available in the rural areas where many live, and transit use requires being able to get from home to the pick-up location and from the drop-off to the final destination. Ride sharing services can also help close the mobility gap for older Americans. But, less than one-third of Americans over 65 own a smartphone, which is a prerequisite for using many ridesharing services. Advancements in self-driving and connected vehicle technology may eventually allow older Americans to retain the convenience of private vehicle travel after they are no longer able to drive. However, the timeline for the widespread use of self-driving and connected vehicles is uncertain, and their adoption by older drivers may be slower than that of the general population.

"Freedom of mobility is a cherished, lifelong right. We owe it to the generation that built our

nation's highway system to further enhance the safety and convenience of our transportation system to meet the mobility needs of older Americans," said Greg Cohen, president and CEO of the American Highway Users Alliance, an organization that advocates on behalf of motorists, truckers, and other drivers. "Making roads safer and supporting the development of emerging transportation options and technology will enhance the mobility of older Americans and the general population."

The TRIP report offers a set of recommendations to improve the mobility and safety of older Americans. Many of these recommendations are designed to reduce the consequences of driving errors, making roads safer for all Americans. TRIP's recommendations include the following. An expanded list can be found in the report.

- SAFER ROADS: clearer, brighter and simpler signage with large lettering; brighter street markings, particularly at intersections; widening or adding left-turn lanes and extending the length of merge or exit lanes; adding roundabouts where appropriate; adding rumble strips; and system planning and design to accommodate technology needs of connected and self-driving vehicles.
- SAFER ROAD USERS: promoting education and training programs for older drivers.
- SAFER VEHICLES: implementing self-driving and connected vehicle technology as well as vehicle safety features that address aging-related deficits, improving vehicles to help withstand and avoid crashes.
- IMPROVED CHOICES: ensuring public transit routes, vehicles, facilities and stops are easily accessible and accommodating to older or disabled passengers; and expanding non-traditional approaches tailored to the needs of older adults.

"The rapidly growing ranks of older Americans will far outpace previous generations with their level of mobility and activity. Serving their mobility needs will require a transportation system that includes safer roads, safer vehicles, safer drivers and improved choices," said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. "Additional federal, state and local transportation funds can help not only older drivers, but all drivers."