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More older drivers are traveling NC roads. Even more are involved in fatal accidents.



North Carolina ranks ninth nationally for the number of licensed drivers – nearly 1.4 million – who are 65 and older. But the state ranked fifth for the number of traffic fatalities that involved at least one older driver – 285 – in 2016.

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North Carolina ranks fifth-highest in the U.S. for the percentage of fatal traffic accidents involving older drivers, a nonprofit transportation research group reports.

The number of older drivers who are involved or killed in traffic crashes is rising even faster than the number of people who are 65 or older, says the [report by TRIP](#), a Washington, D.C.-based group that evaluates economic and technical data on surface transportation.

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The 46 million Americans 65 or older comprise 15 percent of the population, TRIP says. By 2060, their proportion of the population is expected to reach 24 percent. Nearly 80 percent live in car-dependent places such as suburbs and rural areas, the group says.

The report attributes the rising number of fatalities involving older drivers, in part, to physical frailties that make them less likely to survive a crash. While older drivers tend to be more cautious than most on the road, they're also likely to have

poorer eyesight, reaction time, cognitive ability and physical dexterity, it says.

“An additional two million people are expected to call North Carolina home by 2030, with nearly one-third of these individuals aged 65 years or older. TRIP’s report highlights the need for increased safety measures on all of North Carolina’s roadways, which should be a top priority” for the North Carolina Department of Transportation,” Gary Salamido, vice president of Government Affairs for the North Carolina Chamber, said in a statement.

“The North Carolina Chamber is committed to working with TRIP, NCDOT and state legislators to secure the additional resources that are needed to address North Carolina’s growing infrastructure demands and safety issues. This is another example of why North Carolina can’t afford to wait when it comes to addressing the state’s most pressing infrastructure needs.”

The report recommends a range of steps that states can take to make the roads safer for older drivers.

Wider lane striping, larger sign lettering and longer merge or exit lanes are among those strategies, it says. Transit systems and ride-sharing services can also help, it says, and self-driving vehicles are expected to eventually help people who are no longer able to drive.

“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,” Greg Cohen, president and CEO of the [American Highway Users Alliance](#), an organization that advocates on behalf of motorists, truckers, and other drivers, said in a statement. “Making roads safer and supporting the development of emerging transportation options and technology will enhance the mobility of older Americans and the general population.”

TRIP is sponsored by insurance companies, equipment makers, distributors and businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction, labor unions and other groups.