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## Deadliest rural roads are in SC, California and these 23 other states, study finds

By Jared Gilmour

Drivers across the country are more likely to die on rural roads than city streets — but in these states, rural crash deaths are even more common than the national average, a new study finds.

South Carolina had the [highest rate of rural road deaths of any state in 2017](#), followed by California in the No. 2 spot, and then Arizona, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana, Kansas, Oregon and North Carolina, according to a report released on Wednesday by TRIP, an industry-funded transportation research nonprofit.

For every 100 million miles driven on rural, non-interstate roads across the U.S. in 2017, there were 2.14 deaths, the study found. Compare that to what the study found on other roads, which was only 0.88 deaths per 100 million miles traveled.

But in South Carolina, there were 3.6 deaths per 100 million rural miles driven, and 3.16 in California — well above the national average. Those two states were the only ones with more than three deaths per 100 million miles traveled on rural roads in the study.

But why are roads outside urban areas more dangerous, even with less traffic? Researchers noted in a news release on the findings that rural routes tend to have narrower lanes, steep slopes, more hazards, sharp curves, drop-offs in the pavement and little shoulder room.

“The health of the nation’s economy and the safety and quality of life in America’s small communities and rural areas [ride on our rural transportation system](#),” Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP, said in a statement.

Wilkins said he advocates “fixing the federal Highway Trust Fund with a long-term, sustainable source of revenue” to invest in and modernize rural roads.

Many of the states on the list with high rural traffic death rates also ranked high on a separate list cataloging which states have a high percentage of rural pavement in poor condition.

Rhode Island tops that list, with 39 percent of rural pavements considered poor, followed by California in the No. 2 spot with 32 percent of rural pavement in poor condition.

In South Carolina — the No. 22 state on that list — 14 percent of rural pavement is poor, according to the study, which based its ranking on an analysis of Federal Highway Administration numbers.

The report said that only 47 percent of rural roads are in good condition, with 17 percent in fair condition, 21 percent rated mediocre and 15 percent in poor condition.

“Making critical safety improvements to rural roads will save thousands of lives each year and help move our economy forward,” Kathleen Bower, a spokesperson for AAA, said in a statement, according to TRIP.

[TRIP is funded](#) by insurance companies, equipment makers, labor unions and other groups that have a stake in America’s highways, according to the group’s website.

An editorial in The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina, this week asked [how the state can improve its road safety](#) based on the findings in the TRIP report.

“TRIP gets most of its funding from groups that have an interest in spending more on roads, so it’s unsurprising that they would cite potholes and deteriorating pavement as top threats to motorists,” the editorial said. “But a deeper dive into South Carolina’s fatal crash data doesn’t bear that out.”

So what is to blame? According to the newspaper, it’s drunk drivers.

“The most obvious problem is that our state perennially ranks among the worst for drunk driving deaths,” the editorial said. “Fully 32% of all road fatalities in South Carolina in 2017 involved an impaired driver, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.”