

Kentucky's Rural Roads More Deadly Than Most Other States, Report Says

By EVAN HEICHELBECH (KPR) | May 27-28, 2019

Drivers in Kentucky are at a higher risk of losing their lives on rural roads than they are on rural roads across the rest of the country, according to a new report.

A report released on Wednesday by TRIP, a national transportation research group, ranks Kentucky as having the seventh highest fatality rate on rural, non-interstate roads at 2.54 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. The fatality rate on all other roads in the state is nearly two-and-a-half times lower at 1.02 fatalities per 100 million miles traveled, according to the study.

"[Rural roads] are what farmers rely on to get their goods to market," she said. "It's what many truckers rely on for the last portion or the first portion of their haul ... And so it's important to keep rural roads in good condition to keep people safe and to keep commerce moving."

The reasons rural roads are so inherently dangerous can be traced back to the structural safety of the roads themselves, or lack thereof.

"These rural roads oftentimes lack the safety features that would be more common on other roads," Bonifas Kelly said. "Those are things like wider shoulders, or even things like left-hand turn lanes or lighting and illumination. Those safety features all go a long way towards making the driving environment more forgiving so that if a driver does make a mistake, they don't pay for that mistake with their life."



RANK	STATE	Rural Pavements in Poor Condition	STATE	Rural Bridges Poor/Structurally Deficient	STATE	Fatality Rate per 100M VMT on Rural Non-Interstate Roads	Fatality Rate per 100M VMT on All Other Roads
1	Rhode Island	39%	Rhode Island	23%	South Carolina	3.60	0.98
2	California	32%	Iowa	21%	California	3.16	0.77
3	New Mexico	30%	West Virginia	20%	Arizona	2.94	1.31
4	West Virginia	30%	Pennsylvania	18%	Rhode Island	2.57	0.92
5	Hawaii	30%	South Dakota	18%	West Virginia	2.55	0.97
6	Oklahoma	30%	Louisiana	15%	Tennessee	2.55	0.93
7	Mississippi	27%	Maine	14%	Kentucky	2.54	1.02
8	Alaska	22%	New York	12%	Louisiana	2.48	1.21
9	Maine	22%	North Carolina	12%	Kansas	2.47	0.85
10	New Hampshire	21%	Oklahoma	12%	Oregon	2.44	0.68
11	Washington	21%	Michigan	12%	North Carolina	2.43	0.70
12	Pennsylvania	21%	North Dakota	11%	Texas	2.38	1.11
13	Missouri	21%	Mississippi	10%	Alabama	2.38	0.87
14	Connecticut	20%	Alaska	10%	Georgia	2.36	1.00
15	Louisiana	19%	Nebraska	9%	Virginia	2.34	0.57
16	Wisconsin	19%	Missouri	9%	Delaware	2.33	0.74
17	Texas	18%	New Hampshire	9%	Indiana	2.32	0.68
18	Massachusetts	17%	Massachusetts	9%	Oklahoma	2.24	0.86
19	Michigan	16%	New Jersey	9%	Florida	2.23	1.32
20	Vermont	16%	California	9%	Pennsylvania	2.18	0.79
	US AVERAGE	15%	US AVERAGE	9%	US AVERAGE	2.14	0.88

Courtesy TRIP

For the report, researchers analyzed data from the Federal Highway Administration on conditions and safety performance of Kentucky's rural transportation system, such as smoothness of rural pavement and the presence of standard road safety features. Along with taking the data and conditions into account, TRIP used annual fatality statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to determine the fatality rate per 100 million miles traveled.

Further, the report found that 7 percent of Kentucky's rural bridges are rated as poor or structurally deficient, which means there is significant deterioration to the major components of the bridge.

"It's lower than the national average of 9 percent but it is still an alarming number and it shows that there is work still to be done to bring these bridges back into good repair," Bonifas Kelly said of Kentucky's rural bridges. "That does not mean that these bridges are not safe to drive on a regular basis, but many of them do need significant repairs or even replacement."

As for what can be done to repair Kentucky's dangerous rural roads, Bonifas Kelly said the issue primarily lies in a lack of transportation funding.

"The states and the local municipalities are doing a great job with the funds they have available, but there's simply not enough transportation funding to keep these rural roads and the transportation system in general in good condition and operating safely and efficiently," she said.

Courtesy TRIP

Top 25 states with the highest rural road fatality rate

The national average for fatality rates on rural, non-interstate roads is 2.14 per 100 million miles traveled and .88 on all other roads, the report says. South Carolina had the highest fatality rate in the U.S. at 3.6, and nearby states Tennessee and Indiana have fatality rates at 2.55 and 2.32 per 100 million miles traveled, respectively.

"The safety on these roads is not up to par and that means that people are losing their lives unnecessarily," said Carolyn Bonifas Kelly, TRIP's associate director of research and communication. "It really is a national issue on many different fronts."

The report, called "[Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland](#)," also found that 27 percent of Kentucky's rural roads are rated as being in poor or mediocre condition.

Bonifas Kelly said the rural roads in states like Kentucky are critical parts of the transportation system, calling them "the last link in the food chain" for the transportation of many states' commercial and agricultural products.

