

Missouri 11th in the nation for traffic fatalities on rural roads, report says

by Megan Smaltz | Tuesday, May 12, 2020



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COLUMBIA — A recently released report ranked Missouri 11th in the nation for traffic fatalities on rural roads. The report found that traffic crashes and fatalities occur more than twice as often on rural roads than on all other roads.

The National Transportation Research Nonprofit (TRIP) report found that traffic fatalities on rural roads occur at an unreasonably high rate in comparison to crashes and fatalities on non-rural roadways.

The TRIP report finds that traffic crashes and fatalities on rural non-Interstate roads are disproportionately high, occurring at a rate more than double that on all other roads.

This is bad news for Missouri, which not only had an alarmingly high number of traffic fatalities on rural roads but also ranked 13th in the nation for having [rural pavements in poor condition](#) and 14th in the nation for poor or structurally deficient rural bridges.

In addition to Missouri's poor road conditions, the TRIP report noted that rural roads are more likely to have narrow lanes, limited shoulders, sharp curves, exposed hazards, pavement drop-offs, steep slopes, and limited clear zones along roadsides. All of which, play a role in the more than twice as many traffic crashes and fatalities on rural roads reported by TRIP.

Yet, Missouri was not ranked in the top 25 states with the highest number of fatal traffic crashes on non-rural roads.

The TRIP report said this could be because the higher traffic fatality rate found on rural roads results from multiple factors, including a lack of desirable roadway safety features, longer emergency vehicle response times, and the higher speeds traveled on rural roads compared to urban roads.

Additionally, rural roads are more likely than urban roads to be two-lane routes. According to the TRIP report, 86 percent of the nation's rural non-freeway arterial roads have two-lanes, compared to 56 percent of urban non-freeway arterial routes.

While it would be easy to attribute the higher number of traffic fatalities on rural roads to driver behavior, which is a significant factor in traffic crashes, the TRIP report said both safety belt usage and impaired driving rates are similar in urban and rural traffic crashes.

Instead, the TRIP report recommended improving rural roadways as a way to significantly reduce these serious crashes.

“A 2017 report from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that implementing the \$146 billion in needed, cost-effective roadway safety improvements on U.S. roadways would save approximately 63,700 lives and reduce the number of serious injuries as a result of traffic crashes by approximately 350,000 over 20 years.

“Thus, over a 20-year period, every \$100 million spent on needed roadway safety improvements would reduce the number of traffic fatalities by 44 and serious traffic injuries by 760.

The TRIP report recommended road improvements such as installing rumble strips along the centerline and sides of roads, adding turn lanes at intersections, improving roadway alignment, reducing the angle of curves, widening lanes, and improving signage and pavement/lane markings.