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Bumper-to-bumper traffic in N.J. is mostly back. Buses and trains are slower to recover.

By [Larry Higgs | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

Wednesday morning seemed like a return to the bad old days at the Hudson River crossings during the rush hour commute from New Jersey to the city.

A crash on the Route 495 Lincoln Tunnel approach backed traffic up to the New Jersey Turnpike. The Holland Tunnel had 35 minute traffic delays, travel times that are becoming more common.

The [coronavirus traffic volume drop is evaporating](#) in the New Jersey-New York metropolitan area and across the nation, according to federal data and a recently released report.

As an example of that, bumper-to-bumper traffic could be seen on Route 7 near the Route 139 junction to the Holland Tunnel, as seen from a PATH train on Tuesday morning.

“Traffic on the state highway system is almost normal, on toll roads it’s close to normal,” said State Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti last month.

Federal Highway Administration data and a report from TRIP, a transportation industry association back that up.

While pre-pandemic traffic jams in some of the usual places are back, New Jersey didn’t make the top 10 states that exceeded pre-coronavirus traffic levels, [according to a TRIP analysis](#) of changing traffic patterns.

That report is [based on Federal Highway Administration data](#) for March 2021, the most recent statistics available.

Based on March 2021 FHWA traffic volume numbers, New Jersey recorded 5.986 million vehicle miles traveled, which is 14% lower than the 6.669 million VMT in March 2019. However, traffic volume did increase by 24% since Feb. 2021.

Nationally, traffic volume this March was still 3% below traffic volume in March 2019, according to the TRIP report.

The TRIP analysis found that traffic bounced back over March 2019 pre-pandemic levels in 15 other states, in the west and southern U.S.

That doesn’t mean those who are commuting in the region [have an easy ride](#).

Traffic volume at Port Authority of New York and New Jersey’s six river crossings were the first to bounce back last year. Between May 1 and 21, [bridge and tunnel traffic was 5% lower](#) than pre-pandemic levels, officials said. Traffic levels broke records in 2019.

Traffic on the state’s two major toll roads also was up in April, which are the latest figures available. Traffic on the New Jersey Turnpike increased 6.4% since January 2021 and toll transactions, the measurement of traffic used on the Garden State Parkway, increased by 7.1%

“The increase in traffic is primarily due to the gradual re-opening of the state in the first quarter of 2021, as compared to April 2020, which was the peak of the pandemic,” said Donna Manuelli, chief financial officer of the turnpike authority which runs both toll roads. Turnpike.

Another reason for the surging traffic can be seen on commuter buses and trains that have been slow to recover ridership.

“The cause of the increase of traffic congestion during rush hours is easy to trace,” said Robert Sinclair, a AAA Northeast spokesman. “Just look at the decrease in ridership on the LIRR, (NJ Transit) Metro North and the subway. Those not on the railroads are driving.”

Used car sales also went up last year, he said, as some urban dwellers either moved to the suburbs or shunned mass transit over health concerns. Increased traffic, coupled with the gradual reopening of workplaces may be sending people back to transit. NJ Transit reported upticks in rail, bus and light rail ridership last month.

The first quarter 2021 traffic increase builds on a trend that started to be seen last summer, as rush hour traffic rebounded and the Port Authority reported steadily increasing bridge and tunnel traffic.

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