

Arizona interstates have one of highest US fatality rates, report finds



Motorists drive on Interstate 10 in the Phoenix area.



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Drivers on Arizona's interstate highways face one of the highest fatality rates in the nation and cover some of the most mileage in the country, according to a new report assessing the nation's interstate highway system.

The Grand Canyon State ranked No. 4 for interstate fatalities in 2019, with 0.87 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled on its interstate system, according to the report by The Road Information Program, or TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit.

That's actually a better record for interstate fatalities than a year earlier, when Arizona reported 1.09 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles, ranking No. 1 in the Nation. Only Wyoming, New Mexico and Mississippi had higher rates than Arizona in 2019, and Alabama rounded out the top five.

The report, which looked at data from between 2000 and 2019 and comes as the U.S. interstate system turns 65, considered fatalities along with a number of other metrics on the conditions of roads and bridges in the network – with the conclusion that the system is heavily traveled, congested and deteriorating.

The report's authors said current levels of funding need to be more than doubled in order to repair and modernize the system.

"The report released by TRIP confirms what American businesses experience every day – our Interstate Highway System, which was once the envy of the world, is in serious need of modernization," Ed Mortimer, vice president of transportation infrastructure at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said in a statement.

"Commitment to modernization must be shared by federal, state and local leaders as well as the private sector. The Interstate system plays a key national role in

economic success and quality of life for every American, and we urge bipartisan solutions this year to address this critical issue."

More lives saved

Despite Arizona's high fatality ranking, the report highlighted the added safety provided by the interstate system when compared to other roads. Arizona's fatality rate on all noninterstate roads was 1.54 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled.

In fact, TRIP ranked Arizona in the top 20 for the greatest number of lives saved in 2019 as a result of the interstate highway system. The Grand Canyon State came in at No. 17, with 142 lives saved.

Arizonans traveled a total of 15,016 miles per urban lane each day, which was enough to rank the state at No. 16 in that measure. The U.S. average was 14,742 miles per day.

Also, 43% of Arizona's urban interstates are congested during peak hours, which was below the national average of 47%

To Arizona's advantage, only 2% of its interstate pavement was considered to be in poor condition and only 1% of its interstate bridges were in poor condition. Regarding Arizona's interstate bridges, 47% were more than 50 years old and 40% were in fair condition.

National travel increase

Nationwide, the report found that interstate system travel increased by 26% between 2000 and 2019, a rate that nearly tripled the addition of new lane capacity. That contributed to peak-hour congestion rate, according to the report's authors.

In Arizona, travel was up 20%, as measured in vehicle miles traveled on interstates.

Additionally, the report found a 43% increase of combination truck travel on interstates during the period measured, which was more than double the increase of overall vehicle travel (19%). Arizona's combination truck increase was far below the national average, at 7%

The increase in truck travel overall spurred the trucking industry to call for action to make upgrades in the interstate system.

"Our rapidly deteriorating infrastructure is a clear and present danger to our nation's supply chain. Breakdowns in the Interstate Highway System add an annual \$75 billion to the cost of freight transportation, and 67 million tons of excess carbon dioxide emissions are released into the atmosphere every year from trucks stuck in traffic congestion," Chris Spear, president and CEO of the American Trucking Associations, said in a statement.