



ATSSA BLOG

TRIP report analyzes causes of traffic fatality spike and solutions

ATSSA Board Chair Johnson emphasizes collaboration to address trend

Traffic fatalities in the U.S. rose 19% from 2019-2021, far surpassing U.S. vehicle travel for that period, according to a report released this morning by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit.

The report, "[Addressing America's Traffic Safety Crisis: Examining the Causes of Increasing U.S. Traffic Fatalities and Identifying Solutions to Improve Road User Safety](#)," takes a closer look at data from the past two years.

"America faces a roadway safety crisis, with motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists fatalities in 2021 reaching their highest level in nearly two decades. The tremendous toll of fatalities and serious injuries that occur on the nation's roadways are a significant economic and, more critically, personal burden on Americans," the report notes in its conclusion. "The causes of the recent surge in traffic fatalities in the U.S. appear largely to be the result of the public taking greater risks on the nation's roadways, including speeding, impaired driving and reduced safety belt use."

The report notes, as previous reports have, that fatalities increased significantly in 2020 though vehicle travel declined dramatically as a result of people working from home and school closures that started in spring due to efforts to curtail the spread of COVID-19.

Its report analyzes data from 2019, which was pre-pandemic, through 2021, when vehicle travel was returning to normal.

Traffic fatalities increased 8% from 2019-2020 despite the drop in travel, and rose approximately 11% from 2020-2021, the highest increase since 2005, according to the report.

Both the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in an [October 2021 report](#), and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (AAFTS) concluded the increase in traffic fatalities was related to increased risks taken by drivers starting during the pandemic.

TRIP noted in a [statement this morning](#) that a [2017 report](#) by AAFTS indicated the U.S. had a \$146 billion backlog in needed roadway safety improvements and that "increasing investment in roadway safety improvements is likely to pay off in the form of reduced fatal and serious traffic crashes."

The Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) passed in November, offers funding that can significantly address roadway safety, including \$6 billion for the Safe Streets and Roads for All program, \$17 billion for the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), \$4 billion for improved crash data and vehicle, behavior and truck safety programs, \$300 million for rural road safety, and \$120 million for tribal road safety.

ATSSA recognizes the significant opportunity IIJA offers for addressing roadway safety and the importance of collaboration with partners in the transportation industry.

"A driver's human mistake should not result in a life lost – we must recommit to building roads that protect roadway users and workers alike," ATSSA Board Chair Jeff Johnson said. "The safety investments made in the IIJA give state and local governments the funding tools necessary for significant progress to be made on roadway safety infrastructure projects. Now stakeholders must work together to effectively, efficiently and swiftly deploy these lifesaving, cost-effective countermeasures to break the increasing trend of traffic fatalities.

"As ATSSA Board of Directors member Cindy Williams testified before the Highways and Transit Subcommittee in Congress in early June, collaboration is critical to moving our nation [Toward Zero Deaths](#) on U.S. roadways."

TRIP Executive Director Dave Kearby echoed the importance of collaboration in this morning's release.

"Making a commitment to eliminating fatal and serious injuries on the nation's roadways will require robust investment and coordinated activities by transportation and safety-related agencies in providing the needed layers of protection for the nation's motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists, including safe road users, safe roads, safe vehicles, safe speeds and high-quality post-crash care," Kearby said.