

Traffic fatalities are up

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Traffic fatalities in Arizona and across the United States were way up in 2021. It would be easy to blame the surge on the pandemic — all of those shutdowns and stay-at-home orders kept us in our homes, right? — but the details are more interesting than that. A report by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit, says traffic fatalities began to increase dramatically in 2020 even as vehicle travel rates plummeted because of the pandemic.

In 2021, traffic-related deaths increased even more as travel returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Deaths in the U.S. were up by 19 percent from 2019 to 2021, In Arizona, fatalities were up by 14 percent during that same period.

So what gives? The creators of the report suggest people were taking more risks on the road during the pandemic. A survey taken of drivers in fall 2020 asked whether their level of driving had decreased, remained the same or increased since the beginning of covid-19 related restrictions, and whether they had engaged in a variety of risky driving behaviors in the previous 30 days. Survey results suggested drivers who maintained their driving habits throughout the pandemic were more willing to engage in risky behavior, including speeding, not wearing a seat belt, driving while impaired and driving aggressively.

Like a lot of reports, this one includes a call to action for local governments to take advantage of federal infrastructure funding and invest in safety upgrades for local roadways and bridges.

That's certainly what's happening in Lake Havasu City. You may recall that back in April, the Metropolitan Planning Organization announced its top priorities for federal transportation money available to the city over the next four years — which include upgrades to the traffic signals downtown on Lake Havasu Avenue to increase traffic flow and installing a new traffic signal to improve safety at McCulloch and Jamaica boulevards.

So where do you think the most important areas of focus should be for Lake Havasu City when it comes to traffic safety?