

## U.S Traffic Fatalities Surged 19 Percent from 2019 to 2021



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[According to a report](#) released by the [National Transportation Research Group, TRIP](#), the number of traffic fatalities in the U.S. surged by 19 percent from 2019 to 2021. Even though travel rates plummeted during the Covid-19 pandemic, traffic fatalities increased, further increasing in 2021 as vehicle travel returned to near pre-pandemic levels. The report examines possible causes for the increase in traffic fatalities, and prescribes a broad, comprehensive approach to reducing traffic fatalities in the U.S.

In April 2020, vehicle travel was down 40 percent from the previous year due to the pandemic. But, by October 2020, U.S. vehicle travel

rebounded to within nine percent of October 2019 levels. U.S. vehicle travel was 11 percent lower in 2020 than in 2019, dropping from 3.3 trillion vehicles to 2.9 trillion. Despite the decrease in vehicle travel, the overall number of traffic fatalities during the same time increased by eight percent (from 36,096 to 38,824) and the traffic fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel increased by 21 percent (from 1.11 to 1.34).

In 2021, as COVID-related restrictions gradually lifted, U.S. vehicle travel increased to approximately 3.2 trillion miles, a 10 percent increase over 2020 levels, but still three percent below 2019's pre-pandemic levels. From 2020 to 2021 the number of traffic fatalities increased by approximately 11 percent (from 38,824 to 42,915), roughly on pace with the 10 percent increase in vehicle travel during the same time, and the highest number recorded since 2005. The traffic fatality rate in 2021 rose to 1.35 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel.

Bicycle and pedestrian fatalities also increased significantly over pre-pandemic levels. From 2019 to 2021, the number of pedestrians killed increased by 18 percent (from 6,205 to 7,342) and the number of bicyclists killed increased by 16 percent (from 846 to 985). Pedestrian and bicycle deaths accounted for 19 percent of all traffic fatalities in 2021.

The increase in traffic fatalities since the onset of the pandemic appears largely related to increased risks being taken by drivers. In an [October 2021 report](#), the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that "after the declaration of the public health emergency in March 2020, driving patterns and behaviors in the United States changed significantly. Of the drivers who remained on the roads, some engaged in riskier behavior, including speeding, failure to wear seat belts, and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs."

In early 2022 [the U.S. Department of Transportation \(USDOT\)](#) adopted a comprehensive National Roadway Safety Strategy, a roadmap for addressing the nation's roadway crisis which is being adopted by state and local transportation agencies. The objects and elements of the approach include the following: safer people, safer roads, safer vehicles, safer speeds, and post-crash care.

"The dramatic increase in roadway fatalities during the pandemic spotlights a national public health crisis that states have been working to resolve for years," said Jim Tymon, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. "The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides state DOTs with opportunities to expand activities in coordination with partners to double down on integrating a safe system approach and strategies throughout the IIJA. In addition, the increased funding for infrastructure-related improvements and the ability to use a portion of the infrastructure safety funds for behavioral safety programs will advance a much-needed cross-cutting safety culture focused on zero traffic fatalities and injuries."