

TOP STORY

## GETTING THERE: Driving in the time of COVID is a risky adventure

FRONT PAGE

Scott Shenk | Sunday, July 3, 2022



A roadside memorial stands near the site of a fatal crash on State Route 3 in Spotsylvania. Marlo Brooks

Scott Shenk

A NEW REPORT lays out the troubling period of post-COVID life on the nation's roads.

Despite the plunge in traffic at the height of the pandemic, deaths on U.S. roads spiked, and the trend continued in 2021, according to a report by TRIP, a nonprofit transportation research group.

TRIP reported last week that traffic fatalities surged 19% from 2019 to 2021.

In 2020, traffic on U.S. roads was 11% lower than 2019, according to the report. Fatal crashes jumped 8% in 2020, from 36,096 to 38,824. The fatality rate per 100 million miles traveled spiked by 21 percent.

Traffic picked up again last year as pandemic restrictions gradually eased, but there still weren't as many drivers compared to 2019's pre-pandemic levels. Yet, in 2021, deadly crashes jumped by 11 percent to 42,915, the most fatalities since 2005, according to the TRIP report. The fatality rate also increased.

Bicyclists and pedestrians weren't safe either, as those fatalities also spiked.

TRIP also confirmed earlier reports highlighting risky driving as the culprit, quoting the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's observation 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."

TRIP pointed out that NHTSA's data "indicates the number of people killed in

police-reported, alcohol-involved crashes rose by nine percent from 2019 to 2020 and by five percent from 2020 to 2021."

There was a 15% increase in deaths of occupants not wearing seat belts from 2019 to 2020 and a 3% rise from 2020 to 2021.

Speed-related fatal crashes jumped 11% from 2019 to 2020 and 5% from 2020 to 2021.

There also was a dramatic increase in injuries suffered in crashes, with a 21% surge between 2019 and 2020 and a 17% increase through the first eight months of 2021 compared to 2019.

Is anything being done?

TRIP noted that the U.S. Department of Transportation adopted the National Roadway Safety Strategy, aimed at the "nation's roadway safety crisis," something states and other local transportation agencies are embracing.

The safety strategy aims to address the issue through such tactics as education, road design and expanding vehicle technology.

It won't be easy.

The study cites a 2017 report from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety that the U.S. has a \$146 billion backlog of needed roadway safety improvements."

One potential remedy could be the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which will inject \$454 billion between 2022 and 2026.

Happy Fourth of July

### The Free Lance-Star

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#### SPOTSY >> Stars & Stripes Spectacular returns

#### City in Ukraine braces for new battle

SLOYVANSK, PREVIOUSLY OCCUPIED BY SEPARATISTS IN 2014, COULD BE NEXT MAJOR TARGET FOR RUSSIA

BY FRANCISCA EBEL ASSOCIATED PRESS

SLOYVANSK, Ukraine—A group of young, off-duty Ukrainian soldiers gathered at a military distribution center to enjoy a rare respite from the fighting that has again engulfed their fractured home in eastern Ukraine.

As they shared jokes and a pizza, artillery explosions could be heard a few kilometers away—a reminder of the looming battle that threatens to unfold here in the city of Sloyvansk, which was occupied by Russian proxy fighters in 2014.

"Everyone knows that there will be a huge battle in Sloyvansk," said one of the soldiers, who could not be named for security reasons.

Now, eight years after their city was last occupied, the war has returned. Sloyvansk could become the next major target in Moscow's campaign to take the Donbas region, Ukraine's predominantly Russian-speaking industrial heartland.

Russia's defense minister said Russian army forces and a separatist militia on Sunday captured the city of Lyssychansk and now controlled all of eastern Ukraine's Luhansk province.

SEE UKRAINE, A3

Spotsylvania welcomes back the Stars & Stripes Spectacular after a two-year hiatus. The 16th annual Fourth of July extravaganza was scheduled for Saturday, but pushed back a day later due to the rainy forecast. Above: Brooks Jeffries runs through a sprinkler set up by the Spotsylvania Fire Department; second row left: MJ Barnes (center) feeds a police horse grass with Savannah and Neveah

Jones; second row right: Heidi (left) and Randy Helwig hold hands as they walk through the Spotsylvania Courthouse Village during the Spotsylvania Stars and Stripes event; bottom row left: Gavin West (right) and his sister, Zoe, go down a slide; and bottom row right: People gather and play games on the lawn at Spotsylvania Courthouse. For a list of local July Fourth events, see page A2.

#### Spending for security, legal rose in Spotsy

SCHOOL BOARD ADDED DEPUTIES TO MEETINGS IN WAKE OF MASK AND BOOK-BANNING DEBATES

BY ADELE UPHAM CONNER THE PRELANCE-STAR

Spotsylvania County Public Schools paid just under \$2,000 for security at a School Board meeting in April and is regularly paying more for meeting security than in previous years.

The division also paid more for general legal representation the first quarter of this year than in the first quarter of the preceding three years.

One deputy from the Spotsylvania Sheriff's Office is scheduled to be present at each meeting, according to Sheriff's Office spokesperson Troy Skibo, yet the board has requested additional security to be present at seven out of the 13 meetings held through June 13.

Two deputies were present at the Jan. 10, Jan. 28, Feb. 14, March 7 and March 28, and six deputies were present at the

SEE SCHOOLS, A3

#### Driving in the time of COVID risky adventure

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SEE SHENK, A1

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