

Alabama traffic deaths are up after COVID: Here's why, according to experts

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Congestion builds on Interstate 65 following a crash. Traffic congestion often occurs whenever there is a vehicle crash and some Alabama lawmakers would like to add more lanes to the interstate in hopes of reducing the number of traffic jams. (file photo)

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Alabama traffic deaths increased to nearly 1,000 in 2022, a 6 percent rise from pre-pandemic 2019 blamed largely on drivers taking “increased risks,” a new report says.

Those risks include “distracted driving, failure to wear seat belts and driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs,” the nonprofit traffic research organization TRIP said in a report released today at tripnet.org. Research also showed distraction by cell phones as another significant risk.

Traffic deaths in Alabama totaled 989 in 2022, up slightly from 983 in 2021. Both years were markedly higher than the 930 deaths in 2019 and 934 in 2020, the year the pandemic was declared. Vehicle traffic increased 3 percent between 2019 and 2022, the report said.

In Alabama, researchers said those deaths and serious injuries translated to \$8 billion in economic costs in 2022 and up to \$24 billion in “quality-of-life costs” based on National Highway Safety Administration traffic cash cost methodology.

Those costs include “medical care, lost productivity, legal and court costs, insurance administrative costs, workplace costs, congestion impacts (travel delay, excess fuel consumption and pollution), emergency services, and property damage,” the report said.

The state is stepping up traffic safety laws, the report said, including [a bill passed and signed into law by Gov. Kay Ivey this month](#) making use of a cellphone illegal in certain circumstances while driving. Cellphones remain a cause of distraction on the road.

Alabama wasn't the only state showing an impact on its roads. “U.S. traffic fatalities increased 19 percent from 2019 to 2022, from 36,096 to 42,795,” the report said, “and the nation's fatality rate per 100 million (vehicle miles traveled) increased 22 percent during that time, from 1.11 to 1.35.”

Bicycle and pedestrian deaths accounted for 20 percent of all U.S. traffic-related deaths, a 19 percent increase from 2019 to 2022. The pedestrian toll went from 6,205 to 7,345 and bicyclists killed increased 26 percent from 846 to 1,068 in the same period.

Motorcycle deaths also went up 20 percent from 2019 to 2022 from 5,015 to 6,000, the report said. This “coincides with the rise in the share of motorcyclists who reported not wearing helmets, which increased from 17 percent to 29 percent from 2019 to 2021.” Motorcycles are less than 1 percent of annual “vehicle miles traveled” but 14 percent of traffic deaths.