

Poughkeepsie Journal

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28, 2023 | POUGHKEEPSIEJOURNAL.COM

FRONT PAGE

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Traffic deaths surged in New York during pandemic

Thomas C. Zambito

New York State Team

Deaths from traffic accidents surged in New York state between 2019 and 2022, despite fewer vehicles on the road, according to a new report by a transportation research group. There were 1,148 traffic fatalities in the state last year, compared to 931 in 2019, a 23% increase, according to the nonprofit TRIP.

The New York findings track with an increase in traffic fatality rates across the U.S. during the pandemic. Nationally, traffic fatalities went from 36,096 in 2019 to 42,795 in 2022, a 19% jump. However, the 2022 total was a small improvement from 2021 when there were 42,939 fatalities.

Similarly, New York's 2022 total was down slightly from 2021 when there were 1,157 fatalities on state roads.



Nationally, vehicle traffic is 1% below what it was in 2019, a study concluded. But the rate of traffic fatalities, per 100 million vehicle miles of travel, has risen from 1.11 in 2019 to 1.35 last year.

MARK VERGARI/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Why the increase?

Federal safety experts say drivers have been engaging in riskier behavior — speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs, and not wearing seat belts — since the start of the pandemic in 2020.

A 2022 AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety report, based on a 2020 survey of drivers, found a parallel between risky behavior and drivers who ventured out during the pandemic.

"It is possible that many of the individuals who were willing to travel — and even increase their travel — despite the health risks associated with the pandemic were already more willing than average to take other risks," the AAFTS report found.

Between 2019 and 2022, there was a 22% increase in the number of people killed in alcohol-related crashes reported to police, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. And during the same time frame, there was a 20% increase in the number of deaths of passengers not wearing seatbelts.

Are there more cars on the road now?

Yes.

Nationally, vehicle traffic is 1% below what it was in 2019 before the pandemic started, the TRIP study concluded.

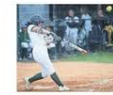
But nationally the rate of traffic fatalities, per 100 million vehicle miles of travel, has ticked upward, from 1.11 in 2019 to 1.35 last year, a slight improvement over last year's 1.35.

New York has seen a 39% increase in fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles, from .75 in 2019 to 1.04 last year, down from 1.06 in 2021.

New York's vehicle miles of travel in 2022 was 9% below 2019 levels. Between 2019 and last year, vehicle miles went from 124 billion to 112 billion. Last year's total was up from 2021 when the state tallied nearly 107 billion miles of travel.

Is there a financial impact?

The TRIP survey estimates serious traffic crashes in New York caused \$136 billion in so-called societal harm. That total includes \$102 billion in quality-of-life costs like physical impairment, reduced life span and physical pain.



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Riskier business



Federal safety experts say drivers have been engaging in riskier behavior since the start of the pandemic in 2020. That includes speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs, and not wearing seat belts.

Traffic deaths surged in New York state during the pandemic

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USA TODAY NETWORK

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Nationally, New York's 2022 total was down slightly from 2021 when there were 42,939 fatalities on state roads.

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Killer of Marist parent is sentenced to 25 years

Michael P. McKinley
USA TODAY NETWORK

A man was sentenced to 25 years to life in a second-degree murder charge for killing the parent of a Marist College student in a shooting last year in the town of Poughkeepsie. The Dutchess County District Attorney's Office said.

Ray Johnson, 35, was also sentenced to more prison time, to run in addition to the murder sentence. He was sentenced to 12 years to prison on two counts of second-degree criminal possession of a weapon, to be 7 years for third-degree criminal possession of a weapon and to be 7 years to prison for first-degree reckless endangerment, according to the district attorney's Office. His sentence also includes two years of supervised release on the second-degree weapon possession.

A jury convicted Johnson in May. Poughkeepsie police accused Johnson of shooting Paul Kutz, 53, in the chest. Kutz was at the Marist in connection with the last day of parents weekend at Marist.

The Kutz family has been devastated in a way that we cannot comprehend. We are so sorry that the sentence will be so small yet provide the family with the ability to move forward," Chief Assistant District Attorney Matthew Voshag said in the statement.

Unhealthy wildfire smoke will return to downstate

Edwards Curves
Business Development and Marketing
USA TODAY NETWORK

Smoke from Canada's raging wildfires is expected to blanket New York state on Wednesday, raising unhealthy air quality levels — again.

It's set to reach downstate by Wednesday evening.

"As we closely monitor the changing forecast, New Yorkers should be prepared for the potential return of smoke from the Canadian wildfires," Hechler said in a statement. "I encourage everyone to remain vigilant, especially if you are vulnerable to air pollution, and stay abreast of the latest information and take steps to protect your health."

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Smoke from Canada's raging wildfires is expected to blanket New York state on Wednesday, raising unhealthy air quality levels. Source: accuweather.com, June 28, 2023.

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Another \$34 billion was for economic costs like insurance, emergency services and property damage.

What can be done?

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Roadway Safety Strategy is encouraging state and local officials to educate drivers about speeding and impaired driving. It's also pushing officials to design safer roadways.

"The approaches to transportation safety that got us to this point are clearly not delivering the impact they once did," said Jake Nelson, AAA's director of traffic safety advocacy and research. "With record-setting investment in our nation's transportation system, we have a real-time opportunity to leverage it to turn the tide on traffic deaths and serious injuries among road users."