

# THE JOURNAL RECORD

THURSDAY, JUNE 22, 2023

## Data reflects alarming rise in road deaths, staggering costs



*Based on traffic crash cost methodology utilized by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, fatal and serious traffic crashes in Oklahoma in 2022 caused a total of \$18 billion worth of societal harm, including \$4.5 billion in economic costs and \$13.7 billion in quality-of-life costs. (Photo by Gwendal Bar on Unsplash)*

By: [Journal Record Staff](#)//June 22, 2023

Fatal traffic accidents have risen at alarming rates in Oklahoma in recent years, and economic and quality-of-life costs related to serious crashes have exceeded \$18 billion, according to a new report.

An examination of data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration by research nonprofit TRIP found that increases in accident deaths in Oklahoma reflected a national trend. Analysts concluded, among other things, that numbers of fatal vehicle accident rose despite Americans logging far fewer vehicle miles traveled, or VMT, especially in earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. As road miles traveled have rebounded over the past year or so, road deaths have declined, though they remain significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels.

In Oklahoma, from 2019 to 2022, the number of traffic fatalities increased by 14% and the fatality rate per 100 million VMT increased by 15%, analysts reported.

- In 2019, there were 640 traffic fatalities reported in the Sooner State as motorists logged an estimated 44.6 billion vehicle miles traveled. That resulted in 1.43 fatalities per 100 million VMT.
- In 2020, the state witnessed 652 traffic fatalities, an estimated 42 billion VMT and 1.55 fatalities per 100 million VMT.
- In 2021, fatalities shot up to 762 as Oklahomans covered an estimated 44.8 billion VMT. Fatalities amounted to 1.71 per 100 million VMT that year.

- In 2022, traffic fatalities numbered 730 as Oklahomans logged 45.1 billion VMT. The ratio of fatalities per 100 million VMT in 2022 was 1.65. Based on NHTSA's traffic crash cost methodology, TRIP estimated that fatal and serious traffic crashes in Oklahoma in 2022 caused a total of \$18 billion worth of societal harm, including \$4.5 billion in economic costs and \$13.7 billion in quality-of-life costs.

Across the U.S. the number of traffic fatalities increased 19% from 2019 to 2022, from 36,096 to 42,795, and the nation's fatality rate per 100 million VMT increased 22%, from 1.11 to 1.35.

U.S. motorcyclist fatalities increased by 20% from 2019 to 2022, from 5,015 to 6,000.

Bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities, which accounted for 20% of all U.S. traffic fatalities in 2022, increased 19% from 2019 to 2022. From 2019 to 2022, the number of pedestrians killed increased 18%, from 6,205 to 7,345, and the number of bicyclists killed increased 26%, from 846 to 1,068.

### Increases in risky behavior

The significant increase in traffic fatalities since the onset of the pandemic appears largely related to increased risks taken by drivers, TRIP said, noting that in the fall of 2021 the NHTSA reported that after the declaration of the public health emergency in March 2020 driving patterns and behaviors in the U.S. "changed significantly." Of drivers who remained on roads, some engaged in riskier behavior, including excessive speeding, failure to wear seat belts, driving under the influence, and driving while distracted.

NHTSA data indicates the number of people killed in police-reported alcohol-involved crashes increased 22% from 2019 to 2022. The number of passenger vehicle occupants not wearing seatbelts who were killed increased by 20%.

NHTSA data found that the number of people killed in speeding-related crashes climbed 23% during that time. From 2019 to 2021, the number of fatalities in distraction-affected crashes increased by 13%, from 3,119 to 3,522.

"The approaches to transportation safety that got us to this point are clearly not delivering the impact they once did," said Jake Nelson, AAA director of traffic safety advocacy and research.