

Why have traffic fatalities increased in California when more people are leaving the state?



Traffic on a Los Angeles freeway during the evening rush hour commute on April 12, 2023 in Alhambra, California. FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP via Getty Images)

by: [Iman Palm](#) | Sunday, July 2, 2023

In recent years Californians, known for their grumbling about traffic, housing costs, and the overall quality of life, have [made good on their promises to leave the Golden State](#) for more affordable alternatives.

However, the effect of having fewer people in the state hasn't stopped traffic fatalities from increasing, according to a [recent study](#).

A report published by TRIP, a transportation nonprofit research organization, found that traffic fatalities in California have increased by 22% from 2019 to 2022. Researchers also found that the likelihood of being killed in a traffic crash increased by 28% during that same time frame.

Other data, like studies from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, echoed similar conclusions. The NHTSA reported that traffic fatalities hit a [16-year high](#) across the country in 2021.

The TRIP [report](#) also looked at traffic fatalities on a national level and found that traffic fatalities increased by 19%.

While vehicle traffic dramatically decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, more people got back on the road as pandemic-era safety ordinances expired. In California, for example, vehicle traffic returned to its pre-pandemic levels by 2022,

Rocky Moretti, TRIP Director of Policy and Research and the study's author, told KTLA.

So why are traffic fatalities rising when California's population is decreasing? Well, that's mainly due to the increase in dangerous driving behavior.

"We've seen a significant increase in the number of people unbelted being killed in traffic crashes; we saw a 23% increase in speeding-related crashes and a 22% increase in alcohol-related crashes," Moretti said.

"The research suggests that after the pandemic, motorists were being more aggressive and were taking greater risks on the roads," he explained. "And we see that in the numbers, which clearly show that traffic fatalities have increased significantly during that period."

The reason why dangerous driving behaviors have increased is still open for debate, with Moretti citing that the reason may vary with each driver. Still, the dramatic increase in traffic-related fatalities in California has urged officials to take steps to ensure the roads are safe for everyone.

To achieve that goal, Moretti says that state and federal transportation agencies should have adequate funding to improve roadway conditions for everyone.

"That can include adding rumble strips, paving shoulders, adding turn lanes and having lighting in urban areas," Moretti said. "The report points out that in California, 29% of traffic fatalities are of pedestrians and bicyclists. So the challenge is to make the roadway environment as safe as possible for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists."

When the [Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017](#) was signed into law, the legislative package included a \$5.4 billion annual investment to fix the state's roads, freeways and bridges. In 2021, the state also received more money from the federal government for roadway investments.

On a personal level, drivers should adhere to standard safe driving practices, including no speeding, driving impaired or under the influence, and ensuring seat belts are fastened to avoid traffic-related incidents and fatalities.