



State ranks 4th in large truck fatalities per 1 million people

December 27, 2023 | by [Dylan Sherman](#)



Debris is cleared off Interstate 30 after an accident involving two 18-wheelers occurred Thursday afternoon in Benton. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Staci Vandagriff)

Arkansas is ranked fourth in the nation in the average number of large truck fatalities per 1 million people, according to a new report by the National Transportation Research Group. Data from the U.S. Department of Transportation was used to calculate the rates. Arkansas has 30 annual large truck casualties per 1 million residents, behind Wyoming, New Mexico and Mississippi, with Wyoming topping the list at 45. Rocky Moretti, director of policy and research for the research group, said Arkansas ranks high on the list because of the amount of freight travel in the state and the percentage of freight travel on rural roads.

Arkansas' share of rural highway travel by combination trucks is at 34%, or third-highest in the nation after Indiana and Nebraska. Moretti said fatalities are much more likely when accidents or crashes occur in rural or remote areas with less access to emergency services or hospitals.

Between 2017 and 2021, there were an average of 91 people killed each year in Arkansas in collisions involving a large truck. Moretti said that the breakdown of fatalities includes 67 people who were not occupants of the truck. Moretti said the issue is not a causation from the trucks, but more so the impairment of other drivers or veering into truck lanes.

"If you think about it, a truck driver, that's their job ... if you think about it they are far less likely to be impaired than a passenger vehicle," he said. "In a significant share of those crashes ... was the passenger vehicle entering the lane of the large truck."

Shannon Newton, president of the Arkansas Trucking Association, said the National Transportation Research Group's numbers are a little misleading when applied to Arkansas. "Using the population of Arkansas, instead of the amount of highway miles that we have or the amount of commercial traffic, if you [were to] rank the 50 states then Arkansas is going to be near the bottom," she said.

Nevertheless, Newton's organization and the Arkansas Department of Transportation both have goals to improve freight safety in the state. One improvement both organizations feel is important is parking facilities for long-haul trucking. According to the state's freight management plan, the lack of adequate truck parking leads drivers to work longer when tired, or resort to parking in unsafe locations such as on-ramps or shoulders.

Dave Parker, spokesperson for the state transportation department, said in an email that the department has already worked on improvements, including a recently completed parking expansion in West Memphis, scheduled improvements on Interstate 30 in Texarkana, and plans to improve select sections of Interstate 40 from Little Rock to West Memphis.

Newton said advancement in safety technology is seen in the trucking industry just as it is in modern cars and will continue to make the industry safer for drivers and others on the road. The trucking association also offers educational courses to various groups, and works in government outreach to lobby on behalf of trucking companies in the state.

As part of the Renew Arkansas Highways program, the state transportation department is committed to rehabilitating or replacing numerous weight-restricted bridges that limit highway freight mobility, according to Parker.

Asked about improving rural highways, Parker said the state plans to improve select parts of Interstate 40, between Little Rock and West Memphis, which carries more than 20,000 trucks per day. "In addition, ARDOT recently awarded a contract to install intelligent transportation systems elements to improve safety and reliability of that corridor," he said.

When it comes to funding improvements, Newton said Arkansas is in a good place when compared to other states, but determining where to spend infrastructure dollars can be tricky. Newton referenced Arkansas Issue 1, which passed in 2020, resulting in continuing a half-cent sales tax, with revenue dedicated to state and local highways, roads and bridges. Had the issue not passed it would have expired in 2023. The half-cent sales tax made up roughly 30%, or \$285 million, of the highway department's \$953.2 million transportation budget in 2023.

It is hard for Arkansas to improve the rural roads that trucks travel because of the makeup of the state's economy, according to Newton. "Major industries in Arkansas include agriculture and poultry," she said. "And both of those are done in very rural parts of the state."

Parker said projects have become more expensive since 2020, but with Issue 1 passing

WEDNESDAY

Cream of the crop
King Cotton boasts slew of talented teams. — [Sara Lee](#)

Half a year of bliss
From fried pickles to strawberry cobbler, here are our favorite recipes. — [Sara Lee](#)

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In the news

Roscoe Mitchell, 54, of Little Rock, was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse in the second degree after a woman reported he had sexually abused her for years. Mitchell was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse in the second degree after a woman reported he had sexually abused her for years. Mitchell was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse in the second degree after a woman reported he had sexually abused her for years.

Markie Barnes, 36, of Little Rock, was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse in the second degree after a woman reported he had sexually abused her for years. Barnes was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse in the second degree after a woman reported he had sexually abused her for years.

Justin Lewis, 38, of Little Rock, was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse in the second degree after a woman reported he had sexually abused her for years. Lewis was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse in the second degree after a woman reported he had sexually abused her for years.

Wendell Johnson, 52, of Little Rock, was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse in the second degree after a woman reported he had sexually abused her for years. Johnson was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse in the second degree after a woman reported he had sexually abused her for years.

Israel expands attacks in Gaza refugee camps

U.S. retaliates for Iran-backed militias' attack
Airstrikes part of response to drone hit in northern Iraq

Clearing the ice

Small patches were cleared, but ice covering the interstate caused a 10-hour delay in Little Rock.

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Election experts worry AI puts voting at risk

AI prompts have convinced some in the U.S. that they could be used to influence voters through the use of deepfakes and other AI-generated content.

Rose Parade float prep begins

Arkansas State University's float for the Rose Parade is being prepared in the weeks leading up to the parade in Pasadena, California.

Griffin: Jonesboro firm OK under law

Griffin's attorney says the firm's operations are legal under state law.

Weather

Little Rock: Partly cloudy, 40-50. High: 45. Low: 35.

Index

Arkansas: 100.00
Dollars: 1.00
Oil: 70.00
Gold: 1,900.00
S&P 500: 4,500.00

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