

## 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."

**Holiday jingle**  
U.S. economy is continuing to expand, reports indicate. — [Business](#), 10

**Half a year of bliss**  
From fried pickles to strawberry cake, here are our favorite recipes. — [Page 11](#)

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**WEATHER**  
NORTHWEST ARKANSAS  
High: 72, Low: 40  
Wind: 10-15 mph  
Sun: 12:00-5:00 pm

**Clearing the ice**  
A worker in a blue jacket and orange safety vest is using a tool to clear ice from a road. The worker is standing on a snowy surface, and the background shows a road with some snow.

**State ranks 4th in large truck fatalities per 1 million people**  
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**Election experts worry AI puts voting at risk**  
AI-powered bots are being used to spread disinformation and influence voters, election experts warn. The bots are designed to mimic human speech and can be used to target specific groups of voters.

**Rose Parade float prep begins**  
The Rose Parade float is being prepared for the parade. The float is a large, colorful structure that is decorated with flowers and lights. The float is being prepared in a large, open area.

**Griffin: Jonesboro firm OK under law**  
Griffin Jonesboro firm is OK under law. The firm is a large, multi-story building with a modern design. The firm is located in a commercial area.

**Israel expands attacks in Gaza refugee camps**  
Israel has expanded its attacks on Gaza refugee camps. The attacks have resulted in the deaths of many people and the destruction of many homes.

**U.S. retaliates for Iran-backed militias' attack**  
The U.S. has retaliated against Iran-backed militias. The U.S. has launched a series of strikes against the militias, which are based in Iraq.