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TRAFFIC

Torrance Co. leads as most dangerous for motorists. See what other counties made the list.



[Mike Smith](#)

Carlsbad Current-Argus

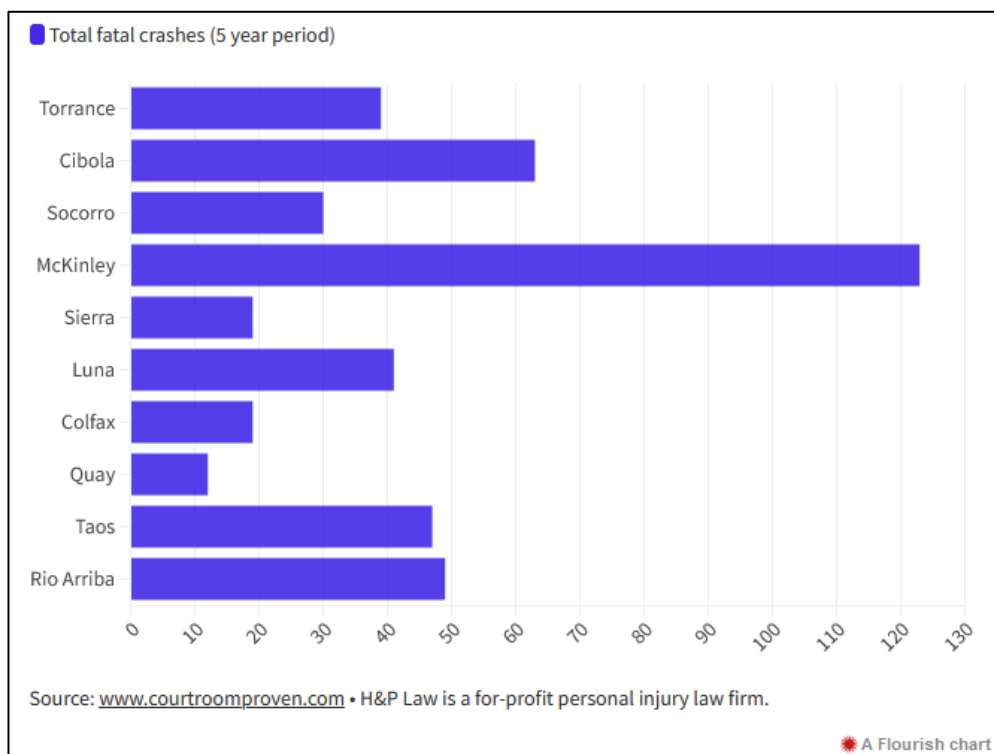
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Motorists traveling through Torrance County in central New Mexico are at a greater risk of injury or death by traffic accident, according to an analysis of fatal crash data.

H&P Law, a for-profit [Las Vegas-based personal injury law firm](#) analyzed data from [Fatality Analysis Reporting System \(FARS\)](#) and the [Federal Highway Administration \(FHWA\)](#) on the number of licensed drivers in New Mexico from 2017 through 2021 involved in fatal crashes, ranking the analysis' results based on a 10,000 county population scale.

With a population of 15,000 people, Torrance County had 39 fatal crashes from 2017 until 2021, according to the analysis — that's a rate of 25.7 fatal crashes per 10,000 licensed drivers. That's [126% above the state average](#) of 11.36 per 10,000 people. And Torrance County isn't alone when it comes to rural roads in the state that allegedly pose a danger, though James Murray, spokesperson for the [New Mexico Department of Transportation \(NMDOT\) District 5](#), said the analysis does not show the progress made to secure drivers who travel New Mexico roads.

Among the Top 10 "most dangerous counties" were Cibola, Socorro, McKinley, Sierra, Luna, Colfax, Quay, Taos and Rio Arriba.



New Mexico Department of Transportation challenges findings

Murray said NMDOT works to maintain state roads in Torrance County, helping to keep motorists safe and their vehicles in good condition.

"Just a few of the things our patrols do on a daily basis includes pothole repairs, mowing the grass on the shoulders to improve visibility, sweeping up dirt and dust from the shoulders to improve drivability," he said.

Murray said in [District 5](#), which encompasses Santa Fe and surrounding area, crews also repair right of way fences to prevent large animals from entering the roadway

along with sealing roads to preserve structural integrity.

[Interstate 40](#) starts in Wilmington, North Carolina and travels through Tucumcari, Albuquerque, Gallup and Grants and ends in Barstow, California.

"Almost 60 miles of I-40 runs through Torrance County and that it is a heavily travelled stretch of road, especially for large vehicles," Murray said. That's why the State in 2023 invested in completing a repaving project of 40 lane miles of roadway, which was removed and replaced, he said.



A semitrailer cruises U.S. Highway 82 east of Artesia on April 18, 2024. An analysis by a Las Vegas, Nevada personal injury law firm noted rural New Mexico counties have some of the highest rate of fatal crashes based on population.

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Other rural New Mexico counties make list for high rates of fatal crashes

Located west of Albuquerque, Cibola County, which ranked second in highest number of reported fatal crashes per population, reportedly had an average of 23.2 fatal crashes per 10,000 people.

Socorro County, ranked third, had a rate of 18.2 fatal accidents per 10,000 residents with 105 fatal crashes across the five-year period included in the analysis.

“The conditions of our roads are of great concern to me and I am troubled to see that Socorro County ranks among the most dangerous counties for drivers,” said [State Sen. Crystal Diamond Brantley \(R-35\)](#).

Brantley, of Elephant Butte, lives in Sierra County. With a population of around 11,000 people, Sierra County had 19 traffic crash deaths from 2017 to 2021 — that’s a rate of 16.5 crashes per 10,000, and according to the analysis ranked fifth behind McKinley County at fourth with a rate of 17.1.

“In recent years, the (New Mexico) Legislature has prioritized our transportation infrastructure, and this past Legislative Session, we appropriated \$205 million for road projects across the state,” Brantley said.



“However, this just a drop in the bucket when you consider the needs statewide.”

Brantley is a member of the Senate Finance Committee, and her District encompasses Luna and Sierra counties - both on the most dangerous list - as well as Hidalgo County and Doña Ana County.

Increased investment needed for New Mexico highways

Brantley said New Mexico’s interstates, interchanges and bridges can pose a hazard to public safety.

“We must ensure that the needs of rural New Mexico are not overlooked,” she said.



Traffic at the intersection of New Mexico State Highway 2 and U.S. Highway 285 near Artesia on April 18, 2024. *Mike Smith, Current-Argus*

A report released in early 2024 by the Washington, D.C.-based [National Transportation Research Group \(TRIP\)](#) noted a lack of sufficient

funding for transportation in New Mexico, a fact that made it difficult to maintain and improve the existing transportation infrastructure in the state.

“Increased investment in transportation improvements could relieve traffic congestion, improve road, bridge and transit conditions, boost safety, and support long-term economic growth in New Mexico,” read part of TRIP’s report.

The cost of deteriorated, congested and unsafe conditions across New Mexico’s roads and bridges can reach as high as \$3.3 billion each year, according to TRIP, placing a financial burden on motorists, in addition to lost time and vehicle wear and tear.

From 2018 to 2022, 2,162 people were killed in traffic crashes in New Mexico. In 2022, New Mexico had 1.77 traffic fatalities for every 100 million miles traveled, the third highest rate in the nation and significantly higher than the national average of 1.35, according to the report.

New Mexico's safest counties for drivers

The news isn't all bad as Los Alamos was ranked the safest county for drivers in New Mexico in the same analysis.

Doña Ana was second with only 4.6 accidents per 10,000. Sandoval County was third with a rate of 5.2 and Otero was fourth with 5.9 incidents per 10,000 people.

The rest of the Top 10 safest list was rounded out with Valencia, Santa Fe, Curry, Chaves, Bernalillo and San Miguel.

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