TRIP Study Says Missouri Traffic Fatalities Up 31 Percent in 10 Years

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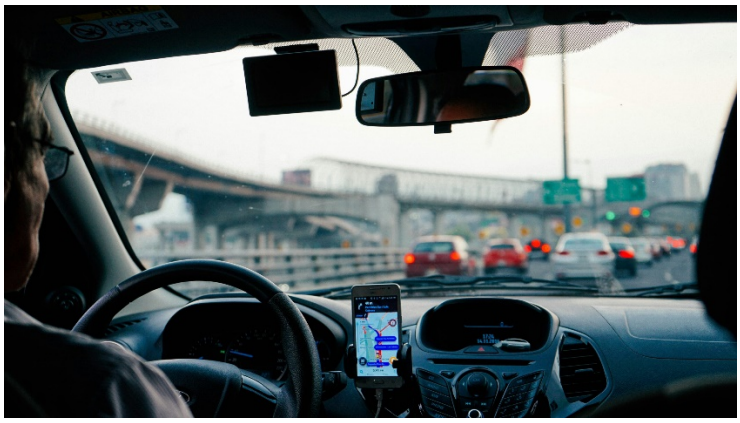

New national report examines causes of increased traffic fatalities and potential solutions

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. traffic fatalities fell in 2023 for the second straight year, three years after traffic fatalities surged in 2020 and 2021 as the nation grappled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, despite the modest decrease in traffic fatalities over the past two years, traffic fatalities in 2023 remained significantly higher than a decade ago. This is according to a report released July 2 by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit. The report, *Addressing America's Traffic Safety Crisis: Examining the Causes of Increasing U.S. Traffic Fatalities and Identifying Solutions to Improve Traffic Safety* documents trends in traffic fatalities from 2013 to 2023 at the national and state levels, examines causes for the increase in traffic fatalities and prescribes a broad, comprehensive approach to reducing traffic fatalities in the U.S.

The number and rate of U.S. traffic fatalities increased dramatically in 2020 and 2021, as driver behavior and travel patterns changed at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. However, following the sharp increase during the pandemic, U.S. fatalities have fallen in 2022 and 2023. Despite progress in recent years, in the decade from 2013 to 2023, U.S. traffic fatalities are up 25 percent and the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel has increased 15 percent.

In Missouri from 2021 to 2023, the number of traffic fatalities decreased 2 percent and the fatality rate per 100 million VMT decreased 3 percent. But despite recent progress, from 2013 to 2023 Missouri's number of traffic fatalities increased 31 percent and its fatality rate increased 13 percent.

The report Appendix includes the number of fatalities and the fatality rate per 100 million VMT in every state and the District of Columbia for 2013 and from 2018 through 2023.

Bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities, which accounted for 21 percent of all U.S. traffic fatalities in 2023, increased 18 percent from 2018 to 2023. From 2018 to 2023, the number of pedestrians killed increased 16 percent (from 6,482 to 7,522) and the number of bicyclists killed increased 29 percent (from 859 to 1,105).

While motorcycle travel accounts for less than one percent of annual VMT in the U.S. (0.7 percent in 2022), there were 6,364 motorcyclist fatalities in 2023, representing 16 percent of all traffic fatalities. U.S. motorcyclist fatalities increased by 28 percent from 2018 to 2023 (from 4,985 to 6,364). This coincides with the share of motorcyclists not wearing helmets, which increased from 20 percent in 2018 to 24.5 percent in 2022.

Traffic crashes result in a significant economic burden. According to a 2023 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) report, the tangible economic costs of traffic crashes include medical care, lost productivity, legal and court costs, insurance administrative costs, workplace costs, congestion impacts (travel delay, excess fuel consumption and pollution), emergency services and property damage. NHTSA has also estimated the annual value of the lost quality-of-life cost of traffic crashes causing serious injury or death. The lost quality-of-life costs include the loss of remaining lifespan, extended or lifelong physical impairment or physical pain.

Based on NHTSA's traffic crash cost methodology, TRIP estimates that fatal and serious traffic crashes in Missouri in 2023 caused a total of $36.7 billion in the value of societal harm, which includes $9.1 billion in economic costs and $27.6 billion in quality-of-life costs.

"Ensuring safety on our nation's roadways is a collective effort involving everyone from drivers to government entities that finance road improvements, as well as manufacturers, contractors and innovators," said Mike Hare, chairman of the board of directors of the American Traffic Safety Services Association. "We must all commit to reducing fatalities and serious injuries on American roadways, which cost an estimated $1.9 trillion last year and caused immeasurable pain and hardship for families."

In 2011 U.S. traffic fatalities dropped to 32,749, the lowest level since 1949 when there were 30,246 traffic fatalities. By 2018, U.S. traffic fatalities had increased to 36,835. Beginning in March 2020, when initial restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic were implemented, the number and rate of traffic fatalities began to increase, even as the rate of vehicle travel decreased dramatically.

The significant increase in traffic fatalities since the onset of the pandemic appears largely related to increased risks being taken by drivers. In an October 2021 report, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that "after the declaration of the public health emergency in March 2020, driving patterns and behaviors in the United States changed significantly. Of the drivers who remained on the roads, some engaged in riskier behavior, including speeding, failure to wear seat belts and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs."

"Despite a drop in U.S. crash fatalities, we know that drivers continue to engage in dangerous behaviors like speeding or driving under the influence," said Jake Nelson AAA director of traffic safety advocacy and research. "The funds to improve our nation's transportation system are available, which means there is no excuse not to improve the safety of our roadways. We must also push for real change in communities where deaths are the highest and ensure that funds are directed to those areas where they are most needed."

Data from NHTSA indicates the number of people killed in police-reported alcohol involved crashes increased 29 percent from 2018 to 2022. The number of passenger vehicle occupants not wearing seatbelts who were killed increased 15 percent from 2018 to 2022.

The share of adult front-seat passengers wearing seat belts reached 92 (91.9) percent in 2023, an increase from 90 (89.6) percent in 2018 and the highest rate yet recorded.

NHTSA data also found that the number of people killed in speeding-related traffic crashes climbed 21 percent from 2018 to 2023 and represented 28 percent of U.S. traffic fatalities in 2023. From 2018 to 2022, the number of fatalities in distraction affected traffic crashes increased by 16 percent, from 2,858 to 3,308.

From 2018 to 2022, crashes in U.S. highway work zones resulted in 4,316 fatalities, increasing 18 percent from 756 in 2018 to 891 in 2022. In Missouri, highway work zone crashes resulted in 99 traffic fatalities from 2018 to 2022. The report Appendix includes the number of work zone fatalities in each state and nationwide from 2018-2022.

To combat the increase in fatalities, in early 2022 the U.S. Dept. of Transportation adopted a comprehensive National Roadway Safety Strategy, a roadmap for addressing the nation's roadway safety crisis based on a Safe System approach, which is also being adopted by state and local transportation agencies. The objectives and elements of the approach include the following:

Safer People: Encourage safe, responsible behavior through education on speeding, impaired driving, safe pedestrian and bicycling behavior; extension of safety belt laws and enforcement; and enhanced enforcements and penalties for speeding and impaired, aggressive or distracted driving.

Safer Roads: Design roadway environments to mitigate human mistakes, account for injury tolerances, encourage safer behaviors and facilitate safe travel by the most vulnerable users.

Safer Vehicles: Expand the availability of vehicle systems and features that help to prevent crashes and minimize the impact of crashes on both occupants and non-occupants. Support the development, testing and deployment of connected and autonomous vehicle technology such as collision avoidance, lane departure avoidance systems and turning detection systems.

Safer Speeds: Where appropriate, provide roadway features to encourage safer speeds, including traffic roundabouts and curb extensions; improved signage and dynamic speed signing at high-risk locations; education on the consequences of speeding; and increased speeding enforcement, particularly at high-risk locations.

Post-Crash Care: Enhance the survivability of crashes through expedient access to emergency medical care, create a safe working environment for vital first responders by preventing secondary crashes through robust traffic incident management practices, increase access to level one or two trauma centers for seriously injured crash victims.

Consistent with the Safe System approach, safety at highway work zones can be improved by implementing a comprehensive work zone safety strategy that includes ensuring a proper work zone layout; prioritizing work zone safety training; ensuring the use of high visibility safety apparel and appropriate traffic control devices; creating an internal traffic control plan; and implementing strategies to reduce aggressive driving.

"We are experiencing what can only be described as a crisis on our roadways as it relates to safety, and it is imperative that transportation agencies address this crisis using all means and methods at our disposal," said Craig Thompson, president of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, who made safety a key area of emphasis for his AASHTO presidential year. "AASHTO is a firm supporter of USDOT's National Roadway Safety Strategy and believes we all play a role in eliminating fatalities on our nation's roadways. State departments of transportation are continuously looking for solutions to alleviate this crisis and sharing best practices through avenues like AASHTO's Safety Summit, which will convene again this fall to bring together transportation leaders and practitioners to help apply safety principles through the transportation project lifecycle, ultimately saving more lives."

Increasing investment in roadway safety improvements is likely to pay off in the form of reduced fatal and serious traffic crashes. The U.S. has a $146 billion backlog in needed roadway safety improvements, according to a 2017 report from the AAAFTS. The report found implementing cost-effective and needed roadway safety improvements on U.S. roadways would save approximately 63,700 lives and reduce the number of serious injuries as a result of traffic crashes by approximately 350,000 over a 20-year period.

Additional funding for improved roadway safety has been provided by the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which was signed into law in November 2021 and provides a significant boost in federal investment in roads, bridges and transit and offers an opportunity for the nation to make progress in improving the safety, reliability and condition of America's transportation system. The IIJA provides $454 billion over the 5-year period from 2022 to 2026 for investment in highways and transit, resulting in a 38 percent increase in federal investment starting in 2022.

The IIJA provides additional resources to address traffic safety, including the following programs: $6 billion for the Safe Streets and Roads for All program; $17 billion for the Highway Safety Improvement Program; $4 billion for improved crash data and vehicle, behavior, and truck safety programs; $300 million for rural road safety; and $120 million for tribal road safety.

"While it is good news that the number of traffic fatalities is trending downward in recent years, the sharp increase in traffic fatalities over the past decade must be addressed," said Dave Kearby, TRIP's executive director. "Making a commitment to eliminating fatal and serious injuries on the nation's roadways will require robust investment and coordinated activities by transportation and safety-related agencies in providing the needed layers of protection for the nation's motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists, including safe road users, safe roads, safe vehicles, safe speeds and high-quality post-crash care."