

## Fatal and critical crashes in South Carolina cost \$30 billion, study shows

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MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. (WBTW) — A recent study shows that fatal and serious crashes in South Carolina resulted in \$30 billion in economic and quality-of-life costs in 2023.

The study looks at the causes of increased traffic fatalities and potential solutions.

Ricky Moretti, the director of policy and research with TRIP, a transportation nonprofit research organization based in Washington, D.C., said organizations across the country are doing a “safe system approach,” which is a broad-based, holistic approach to address what he calls a “traffic safety crisis.”

Moretti said it starts with the motorists themselves driving at safer speeds and not being impaired while behind the wheel. He also said it goes beyond that — to the infrastructure we are driving on.

“We know that when we do a variety of cost effective safety improvements, from adding rumble strips on rural roads, to adding turn lanes at busy intersections, to paving shoulders where it’s appropriate, to making sure that facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists are as safe as possible,” he said. “When we make these improvements, we see a significant benefit in terms of traffic safety.”

From 2013 to 2023, South Carolina’s number of traffic fatalities rose 34%. The fatality rate increased by 9%.

Moretti said \$8 billion of that are the economic costs, which is lost productivity or lost time because of people’s injuries or if they had been killed.

“Looking at the \$23 billion costs, which are the actual quality-of-life costs, those are the devastating costs that when someone obviously loses a loved one,” he said. “When you look at those costs, they are significantly higher.”

The number and rate of U.S. traffic fatalities increased greatly in 2020, being 1,066, and then increasing in 2021 to 1,198. However, it decreased in 2023, to 1,028.

While the number did go down, it is still significantly higher than a decade ago, being 767 in 2013.

Moretti said on average, more than 1,000 people are being killed in traffic crashes in South Carolina.

“About 18% of them are actually pedestrians or bicyclists, so this is really impacting everyone in South Carolina who are trying to get places,” Moretti said. “The challenge moving forward is reducing the number. The correct number needs to be zero, but how do we continue to see those numbers come down.”

While most crashes are on roadways, there are still fatalities in highway work zones. In South Carolina, highway work zone crashes resulted in 54 fatalities from 2018 to 2022.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has taken on a national roadway safety strategy based on a safe system approach.

Moretti said some of the elements of the approach include safer people, safer roads, safer vehicles, safer speeds and post-crash care.

“That definitely is a crisis that we’re facing and moving forward. It really is going to take a comprehensive approach,” he said. “Starting with the motorists, including making sure the infrastructures are as safe as possible and also looking at things like post-care crash, making everything as effective as possible.”

TRIP said ensuring safety on our roadways is a collective effort