

Virginia traffic fatalities increase 24% over past decade and it's costing the Commonwealth billions



Story by Emily Harrison | July 4, 2024

A new report from the National Transportation Research Nonprofit, or TRIP, shows that not only has traffic fatalities increased a startling amount in the past decade, but it has also cost the Commonwealth thousands of lives and billions of dollars.

"Any life lost on the roads is one life too many," said Carolyn Kelly, Director of Communications with TRIP. "We need to come together and do more to make sure driving mistakes do not become fatal crashes."

According to the data, Virginia's traffic fatalities have increased 24% in the last 10 years.

The numbers spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic all across the nation, and an especially high spike was recorded in 2022 in Virginia with more than a thousand lives lost on the roads.

Kelly said during the pandemic, researchers believe some drivers picked up aggressive driving habits.

"Drivers were faced with wide open roads as vehicle travel did plummet starting in the spring of 2020, and so faced with these wide open roads -drivers who were on the road began to adopt riskier behaviors," said Kelly.

This includes increases in speeding, driving while under the influence of drugs and alcohol, and reckless driving.

Over the past two years, Kelly said Virginia has seen modest decreases in the amount of traffic fatalities on the road, but the numbers from 2023 are still significantly higher than seen a decade ago.

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.

"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 (AASHTO).

The rise in fatalities is also costing the state approximately \$34.1 billion dollars in economic and quality of life costs.

"Now that's the value of societal harm and that includes 8.5 dollars in economic costs and an additional 25.7 billion in quality of life costs," said Kelly.

To combat the increase in fatalities, Kelly said she and others in the TRIP organization are urging for road safety measures such as adding more shoulders to roadways and rumble strips.

"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."