

Traffic safety advocates want crash location data — Lafayette officials won't give it to them

By CAMDEN DOHERTY | camden@thecurrentla.com | May 7, 2025



A bicyclist crosses the Evangeline Thruway at East Simcoe Street on Wednesday, Jan. 19, 2022, in Lafayette, Louisiana.

STAFF PHOTO BY BRAD BOWIE

Biking around Lafayette can be dangerous. A majority of the state and major local roadways in town — 65% according to a recent report by the TRIP National Transportation Research Group — are in poor or mediocre condition. As a state, Louisiana consistently finds itself among the most dangerous states for cyclists and pedestrians.

But for local advocates hoping to make Lafayette safer, an administrative hurdle presents a major roadblock: While data on the most dangerous roads and intersections exists, the government refuses to share it, citing federal law.

General traffic statistics about Lafayette Parish are readily available to the public. The Center for Analytic Research in Transportation Safety (CARTS) breaks down crash data in the state by everything from the type of accident to injury numbers. According to CARTS, Lafayette Parish had 54 fatalities of pedestrians and cyclists between 2019 and 2023.

But figuring out where those crashes take place — important information in any effort to prevent future deaths — is where things get tricky.

“In order for us to be good advocates, we need to be able to see the data,” says Matt Holland, secretary and treasurer of Bike Lafayette, a local biking advocacy group. Holland has taken matters into his own hands by compiling data pulled from news releases, but that only gets him so far. For example, he’s only able to count fatalities that way, not injuries.

The data he’s seeking is available, and other cities, like Houston and New Orleans, are releasing it to the public.

The New Orleans Transportation Safety Dashboard maps the city’s crash data onto its city map. The map shows the location of crashes on city roads and allows users to break down the data based on pedestrian-involved or bicycle-involved crashes up to 2023, using data given to New Orleans by Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development annually.

Allene La Spina, executive director of Bike Easy, a nonprofit safety activism group for bikers in New Orleans, calls the city’s dashboard “a step in the right direction in making the data more accessible,” even if it is not a perfect tool.

The organization has used the dashboard to point out problem roadways to lawmakers and city staff, with a special emphasis on high-traffic state roads that run through the city.

“The main thing is prioritizing that this is a useful tool for not only elected officials, but also advocates in this space,” says La Spina, who says her nonprofit is working to develop more buy-in from city staff and elected officials on safety measures for bikers and pedestrians.

Meanwhile, Lafayette Consolidated Government cites a federal statute to argue why it won’t release the data. Officials say the data compiled by the state is not theirs to share, even though much of it is collected by local law enforcement.

That statute, 23 U.S.C. 407, bans data and reports used for safety planning from discovery in federal and state courts, but says nothing about their publication or use for other purposes. The statute specifically applies to roads eligible for federal funding, which in Louisiana includes the state highway system. Some of Lafayette’s major thoroughfares, such as Ambassador Caffery Parkway and LA 94, are part of that system.

“My concern is that the reason they don’t want to share the data is because they are not doing the necessary work,” says Holland.

But judging local government’s efforts to combat fatalities and injuries by simply looking at high-injury locations isn’t quite fair, says Ashley Moran, planning and policy manager for the Acadiana Planning Commission. Such maps only reflect areas with the most traffic density, she says.

According to Moran, the APC uses an approach to roadway improvements that is pushed by the Federal Highway Administration and adopted by many other states, called the Zero Deaths and Safe System Approach.

That is the same program touted on the New Orleans website as part of a mission statement along with the dashboard of data LCG refuses to release.

This practice uses formulas to determine areas where crashes are overrepresented and target those areas for improvement, often zeroing in on high-speed, multi-lane urban roads, known as arterials, the same roads that Bike Easy’s advocacy focuses on.

However, most of this process, including the formulas for calculating, is not public, leaving the same problem for activists who are looking to hold planners and local governments accountable, or advocate for more funding, including from federal sources.

“I believe bringing more awareness would help acquire more funding across the board,” says Ross.

Read the full story at thecurrentla.com.