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Maine traffic deaths are rising faster than the rest of the nation, new study says

Since 2014, annual traffic fatalities in Maine have increased by 37%, according to the national study by the nonprofit TRIP. State officials say those numbers may not give a full picture, though.



A sign alerts drivers to their speed through a construction zone on Interstate 295 in Falmouth in April. Annual traffic fatalities since 2014 have increased at a higher rate in Maine than the country as a whole, a new national study says.

(Brianna Soukup/Staff Photographer)

[Drew Johnson Staff Writer](#)

Annual traffic fatalities in Maine have increased significantly over the past 10 years, outpacing the country as a whole, a new national study says. The study, released Wednesday by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit, focuses on traffic fatalities and identifying solutions to improve safety.

Traffic deaths in Maine have increased by 37% in the past decade, rising from 131 fatalities in 2014 to 179 in 2024. The fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled is also up by 28% over that period.

Maine traffic fatality data

From 2014 to 2024 the number of traffic fatalities in Maine increased 37% and the state's fatality rate increased 28%. From 2021 to 2024, the number of Maine traffic fatalities increased 17% and the fatality rate per 100 million VMT* increased 12%.

	2014	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2014-2024 Change	2021-2024 Change
Traffic Fatalities	131	157	164	153	182	135	179	37%	17%
Fatalities per 100M VMT*	0.92	1.06	1.25	1.05	1.24	0.90	1.18	28%	12%

SOURCE: TRIP • STAFF VISUALIZATION | JAKE LAWS

*"Fatalities per 100M VMT" = Fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel.

Nationally, traffic deaths rose by 20% in the same time frame, with only an 11% increase in fatalities per 100 million VMT, according to the study.

The study concluded that serious traffic crashes in Maine in 2024 resulted in \$2.6 billion in economic costs and another \$8 billion in quality-of-life costs.

"This report underscores the urgent need for sustained investment and coordinated action to reverse the troubling trend in traffic fatalities," said Mike Hare, chairman of the board of directors of the American Traffic Safety Services Association, in a news release Wednesday. "While

recent declines (nationally) are encouraging, the human and economic toll remains far too high."

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on traffic fatality data in 2020 and 2021, the study notes. The study's authors cited a report from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that found "after the declaration of the public health emergency in March 2020, driving patterns and behaviors in the United States changed significantly." While there were fewer drivers on the road during the pandemic lockdowns, the report found that more drivers were speeding, not wearing seat belts or driving under the influence [at the time](#).

Since 2021, traffic deaths nationally have declined by 13% — but in Maine, they have increased by 17% over that period, the study says. However, some officials at the Maine Department of Transportation say TRIP's study doesn't paint the whole picture.

While the 37% increase between 2014 and 2024 is accurate, Bob Skehan, the director of the department's office of safety and mobility, noted that the 2014 mark of 131 traffic deaths was the lowest that the state had seen in almost 20 years.

Using five-year averages, Skehan said, Maine DOT pins the increase between 2014 and 2024 at closer to 10%.

"There are pretty substantial year-to-year variations," he said, and comparing five-year averages "smooths out that variability" and "gives us a more accurate picture of what the trend really is."

SEEKING SOLUTIONS

To curb traffic fatalities, the study recommends more education on speeding, impaired driving and seat belts.

It also suggests improving road infrastructure to mitigate the chance of driver mistakes and encouraging drivers to slow down with curb cuts and roundabouts.

And it calls for the increased support of vehicle safety testing and development, such as collision avoidance and lane departure systems. Maine DOT has long been working on a number of strategies to mitigate traffic deaths, many of which are in line with the study's recommendations. Skehan said some initiatives focus on "hot spots," like [particularly dangerous intersections](#), while others are broader.

Sometimes it's as simple as implementing all-way stops at high-crash intersections that previously only had two-way stops. That strategy has worked well in Maine, Skehan said.

Rumble strips are another strategy the department has been using more often. Skehan said there are nearly 1,000 miles of centerline rumble strips in Maine, and the department's goal is to build an additional [100 miles per year](#).

"Our program is primarily focused on roadway segments 45 miles per hour or higher," Skehan said, keying in on the state's busiest rural roads to start. "Those have been pretty effective for us."

A recent [University of Maine study found](#) that centerline rumble strips reduce head-on and opposite sideswipe collisions by anywhere from 28% to 48%.

Maine DOT also works with municipalities to make travel in busy downtown areas safer for everyone. Temporary curbing, more visible crosswalks and lower speed limits are just a few strategies.

"All of this kind of goes hand in hand, but there's no one thing we're doing," Skehan said. "We're doing a whole suite of things — a toolbox, if you will — based on this situation we find ourselves in."