LASSEN COUNTY Times

The online edition of the Lassen County Times newspaper.

Nevada traffic fatalities up 45 percent in last decade, — 2024 fatality rate is 6th highest in nation

July 24, 2025 | TRIP Special to LassenNews com

U.S. traffic fatalities fell in 2024 for the third straight year, four years after traffic fatalities surged in 2020 and 2021 as the nation grappled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, despite the decrease in traffic fatalities over the past three years, traffic fatalities in 2024 remained significantly higher than a decade ago.

This is according to a report released 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 2014 to 2024 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 each year from 2022 through 2024.

Despite progress in recent years, in the decade from 2014 to 2024, the number of U.S. traffic fatalities is up 20 percent and the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel increased 11 percent.

Nevada's 2024 traffic fatality rate per 100 million VMT of 1.49 was the sixth highest in the U.S. and higher than the national average of 1.2.

From 2014 to 2024 the number of traffic fatalities in Nevada increased 45 percent and the state's fatality rate increased 30 percent.

The report's Appendix includes the number of fatalities and the fatality rate per 100 million VMT every state and the District of Columbia for 2014 and 2019-2024.

Bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities, which accounted for 21 percent of all U.S. traffic fatalities in 2024, increased 16 percent from 2019 to 2024. From 2019 to 2024, the number of pedestrians killed increased 14 percent (from 6,205 to 7,046) and the number of bicyclists killed increased 31 percent (from 846 to 1,110).

According to the TRIP report, there were 6,228 motorcyclist fatalities in 2024.

And while motorcycle travel accounted for just 0.6 percent of annual VMT in the U.S. in 2023, motorcyclists represented 16 percent of all traffic fatalities.

The fatality rate per 100 million miles of travel in 2023 for motorcyclists was 29 times higher than for passenger car occupants (31.39 versus 1.10).

U.S. motorcyclist fatalities increased by 24 percent from 2019 to 2024, from 5,015 to 6,228. The share of motorcyclist not wearing helmets increased from 17 percent in 2019 to 29 percent in 2021, then dropped to 18 percent in 2023.

From 2019 to 2023, crashes in U.S. highway work zones resulted in 4,470 fatalities, increasing 6 percent from 845 in 2019 to 898 in 2023.

In Nevada, highway work zone crashes resulted in 39 traffic fatalities from 2019 to 2023. The report Appendix includes the number of work zone fatalities in each state and nationwide from 2019-2023.

"Traffic deaths have surged over the past decade, and that should worry all of us," said Jake Nelson, AAA's director of traffic safety advocacy and research. "The recent progress is good news, but our roads are still way too dangerous — especially for people walking, biking or on motorcycles. We know what works. Now it's time to act."

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 Nevada in 2024 caused a total of $18.1 billion in the value of societal harm, which includes $4.5 billion in economic costs and $13.6 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. "While recent declines are encouraging, the human and economic toll remains far too high. ATSSA remains committed to working with our partners across all levels of government and industry to help forward safety solutions that save lives."

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."

Data from NHTSA indicates the number of people killed in police-reported alcohol involved crashes increased 22 percent from 2019 to 2023. The number of passenger vehicle occupants not wearing seatbelts who were killed increased four percent from 2019 to 2024. The share of adult front-seat passengers wearing seat belts in 2024 was 91 percent (91.2), an increase from 90.7 percent in 2019 but lower than the rate in 2023 – 91.9 percent, which is the highest rate yet recorded.

NHTSA data also found that the number of people killed in speeding-related traffic crashes climbed 16 percent from 2019 to 2024, and represented 28 percent of U.S. traffic fatalities in 2024. From 2019 to 2023, the number of fatalities in distraction affected traffic crashes increased by five percent, from 3,119 to 3,275.

To combat the increase in fatalities, in early 2022 the U.S. Department 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.

“State departments of transportation across the country are encouraged to see progress in driving down roadway fatalities, but we still have so far to go,” said Jim Tymon, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. “While safety has always been the top priority for state DOTs, AASHTO members continue to look for ways to make impactful changes. State DOTs are focusing on ‘centering safety,’ or ensuring safety is at the center of every action they take. As we look to the next federal surface transportation reauthorization, we see an opportunity to make robust investments in our transportation networks and build on the successes we have seen the last few years in reducing the number of roadway fatalities.”

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 five-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 is set to expire on September 30, 2026.

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 (HSIP); $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.

Dave Kearby

“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.”