

# LAS VEGAS SUN

LOCALLY OWNED AND INDEPENDENT | SUNDAY, JULY 27, 2025

FRONT PAGE

## Our streets are paved with tragedy

Traffic fatalities continue to climb in Nevada, but authorities offer reason for hope



A Metro Police crime scene analyst takes photos at a fatal accident scene on southbound Boulder Highway Wednesday, April 17, 2024. An adult and child were killed and three others were injured, police said.

Photo by: Steve Marcus

By Grace Da Rocha (contact)

Nevada ranks among the most dangerous states for road travel, placing sixth nationwide in traffic fatalities according to a new report from TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit.

The organization's 2024 study, "Addressing America's Traffic Safety Crisis," found that Nevada recorded approximately 1.5 deaths for every 100 million vehicle miles traveled last year — a rate that significantly exceeds the national average of 1 fatality per 100 million miles. This encompasses motorists, motorcyclists, pedestrians and bicyclists killed in traffic crashes.

It hasn't gotten better this year, with already 194 roadway fatalities, said Anita Pepper, public information officer for the Nevada Department of Public Safety's Office of Traffic Safety.

"The traffic fatalities in Nevada have been trending upward for the past five years," Pepper said. "These numbers are more than just data points; they represent people, families and communities that are forever changed."

TRIP estimated that fatal and serious crashes in Nevada last year caused \$18.1 billion in "societal harm," \$4.5 billion of that representing economic losses and \$13.6 billion in quality-of-life costs. TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based organization founded in 1971, compiled the findings using data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Federal Highway Administration for its report released this month.

Nevada's public safety office reported 412 fatalities — 293 were in Clark County — in 2024 to mark a 6% increase from 2023. The contributing factor for many of the fatalities was impairment and speeding, the office said.

It was the second-highest number of road fatalities in Nevada's history, said Erin Breen, director of UNLV's Road Equity Alliance Project, which seeks to create safer roads for all users. The Office of Traffic Safety noted that the top contributing factors for these fatalities was impairment and speeding. It continues a grave trend: Between 2014 and 2024, traffic fatalities in the Silver State increased by 45%. They have jumped by 9% since 2021.

Many of those traffic fatalities involved what transportation and public safety experts call "vulnerable road users" — motorcyclists, bicyclists and pedestrians. In 2024, bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities accounted for 21% of all U.S. traffic fatalities and have increased 16% since 2019.

Clark County was an especially perilous year for pedestrians in 2024, Breen noted. The office of traffic safety reported at least 112 pedestrian fatalities in 2024, making it the deadliest year on record for those walking the streets of Nevada. While 63% of pedestrian deaths do occur outside of marked walkways, Breen explained that there are also many roads in Clark County that were created without pedestrians in mind, making it harder for those on foot to navigate without a car. That, along with high-speed limits and reckless behavior from drivers, can lead to the deadly accidents this region has seen more of in recent years.

"We live in a city that was absolutely built for cars and not for people, and so, what we knew was a trend worldwide and finally has come to Clark County is that you have to plan roads for every kind of road user," Breen said. "My mantra for my whole career has been, if you build a road that's safer for a pedestrian, you've built that road to be safer for everyone because ... they're the most likely to die in a crash."

But there is hope on the horizon for road improvements in Southern Nevada, Breen stressed.

Multiple projects are underway across the valley to redesign hotspots of traffic activity and make them safer for all road users, including the Reimagine Boulder Highway and Maryland Parkway Bus Rapid Transit Project.

Both projects, once complete, will bring designed bus and bicycle lanes, wider sidewalks, increased greenery and improved pedestrian walkways to their respective roads. The Maryland Parkway project is more than 25% finished and scheduled to be completed in fall 2026, according to the Regional Transportation Commission's online tracker.

Henderson expects construction on the Reimagine Boulder Highway to end in July 2027. The projects were funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the signature piece of legislation from President Joe Biden that aims to rebuild and upgrade America's infrastructure with an investment of \$1.2 trillion over eight years.

Additionally, the transportation commission launched a comprehensive community input campaign, inviting residents to weigh in on three major regional initiatives through public surveys.

The campaign focuses on "Safe Streets for All — Let's Go Safely," a regional safety action plan designed to address traffic dangers; "Let's Go Charleston," a transformation project for the 17-mile Charleston Boulevard corridor; and "Southern Nevada Strong 2050," a long-term regional plan aimed at expanding housing options, creating higher-paying jobs and improving transportation infrastructure throughout the area.

All studies and their respective surveys are available on the RTC's website: [tcsnv.com/projects-initiatives/planning/community-engagement](https://tcsnv.com/projects-initiatives/planning/community-engagement).

"The frustrating truth is that traffic fatalities are preventable. Risky driving behaviors like speeding, impairment and distraction continue to contribute to deadly crashes," Pepper said. "The Nevada Office of Traffic Safety remains focused on changing these outcomes. We remind every driver to choose safety first when on the road, and as a passenger, if you're



A Metro Police crime scene analyst takes photos at a fatal accident scene April 17, 2024, on southbound Boulder Highway.

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Editor's Note: This article contains information that is subject to change.

By Grace Da Rocha

A version of this story appeared in the newspaper.

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in a car where you feel the driver is engaging in dangerous behavior, it's OK to speak up. The roads are used by everyone in Nevada, and everyone deserves to get to their destination safely."

What we are seeing in Nevada isn't the norm.

Traffic fatalities across the United States have shown signs of decline after spiking following COVID-19 closures. When businesses reopened and travel restrictions lifted, the sudden return of vehicles to previously empty roads contributed to a surge in deaths that peaked at over 43,000 in 2021.

Since then, the numbers have steadily improved, according to the TRIP report. Fatalities dropped to 42,514 in 2022 and continued their downward trajectory through 2024, when 39,345 Americans died in traffic crashes — representing a notable 9% decrease from the previous year's total of 40,901 deaths.

"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," said Dave Kearby, TRIP's executive director in a statement.

[grace.darocha@gmvgegas.com](mailto:grace.darocha@gmvgegas.com) / 702-948-7854 / @gracedarocha

grace.darocha@gmvgegas.com / 702-948-7854 / @gracedarocha

grace.darocha@gmvgegas.com / 702-948-7854 / @gracedarocha

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