



A National  
Transportation  
Research  
Nonprofit

[www.tripnet.org](http://www.tripnet.org)



# GETTING HOME SAFELY:

## EXAMINING TRAFFIC SAFETY IN OKLAHOMA & FURTHER STEPS NEEDED TO IMPROVE TRAFFIC SAFETY IN THE SOONER STATE

MARCH 2026

Founded in 1971, TRIP® of Washington, DC, is a nonprofit organization that researches, evaluates and distributes economic and technical data on surface transportation issues. TRIP is sponsored by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, distributors and suppliers; businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction; labor unions; and organizations concerned with efficient and safe surface transportation.

Whether people are traveling to work or school, shopping, or visiting friends, getting home safely is the most important consideration. With travel continuing to increase in Oklahoma, it is important that every practical step is taken in the Sooner State to minimize the likelihood of traffic crashes that can result in injuries and deaths.

This report examines highway safety in Oklahoma, describes efforts the state has made to reduce traffic fatalities in the state, and includes steps that can be taken to further improve traffic safety in Oklahoma.

### OKLAHOMA TRAVEL AND TRAFFIC FATALITIES

After a significant decline during the COVID 19 pandemic, vehicle travel in Oklahoma has rebounded and now exceeds pre-pandemic levels, reflecting ongoing population and economic growth in the state. From 2019 to 2025, vehicle miles of travel in Oklahoma increased by seven percent.<sup>1</sup>

From 2020 to 2025, there were 4,127 traffic fatalities in Oklahoma, including motorists, motorcyclists, pedestrians and bicyclists, an average of 688 traffic fatalities annually.<sup>2</sup>

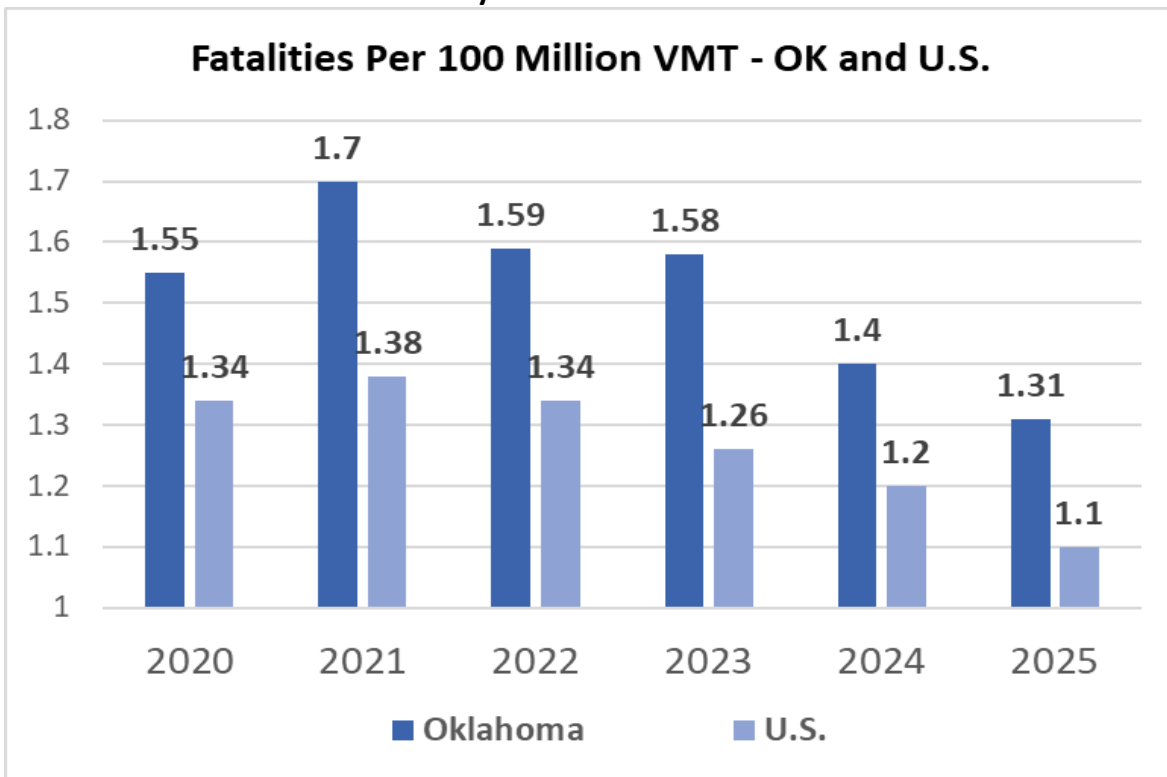
**Chart 1. Oklahoma Traffic Fatalities, 2020 to 2025.**

Year	Traffic Fatalities
2020	653
2021	762
2022	710
2023	718
2024	645
2025	639
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,127</b>

**Source: Oklahoma Department of Transportation.**

Oklahoma's rate of traffic fatalities per 100 million miles of travel remains significantly higher than the national average. In 2025 Oklahoma's traffic fatality rate per 100 million miles of travel was 1.31 – 19 percent higher than the national average of 1.1.<sup>3</sup>

**Chart 2. Oklahoma and U.S. Traffic Fatality Rate 2020 to 2025.**



**Source: Oklahoma Department of Transportation and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.**

The traffic fatality rate on Oklahoma’s rural non-Interstate routes is 62 percent higher than the fatality rate on all other roadways in the state.<sup>4</sup> In 2023, the rate of traffic fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on Oklahoma’s non-Interstate rural roads was 2.08, while the fatality rate on all other roads and highways in Oklahoma was 1.28.<sup>5</sup> And while 36 percent of vehicle travel in the state took place on non-Interstate rural roads, 48 percent of fatalities occurred on these roads.<sup>6</sup>

From 2020 to 2025, 14 percent of those killed in traffic crashes in Oklahoma were pedestrians or bicyclists. A total of 520 pedestrians and 77 bicyclists were killed in Oklahoma crashes from 2020 to 2025.<sup>7</sup>

**Chart 3. Oklahoma Pedestrian and Bicycle Traffic Fatalities, 2020 to 2025.**

Year	Total Fatalities	Pedestrian Fatalities	Bicycle Fatalities	Share Bike & Pedestrian
2020	653	79	11	14%
2021	762	107	14	16%
2022	710	83	12	13%
2023	718	83	15	14%
2024	645	90	13	16%
2025	639	78	12	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,127</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>14%</b>

**Source: Oklahoma Department of Transportation.**

In addition to fatalities, traffic crashes in Oklahoma result in a significant number of injuries. From 2020 to 2025, traffic crashes in Oklahoma resulted in 76,661 injuries, including 12,715 serious injuries.<sup>8</sup>

**Chart 4. Oklahoma Traffic Injuries, 2020 to 2025.**

Year	Serious Injuries	Minor Injuries	Total Injuries
2020	2,061	8,418	10,479
2021	2,073	9,434	11,507
2022	2,112	10,860	12,972
2023	2,078	12,769	14,847
2024	2,262	13,732	15,994
2025	2,129	8,733	10,862
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,715</b>	<b>63,946</b>	<b>76,661</b>

Source: Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

### WORK ZONE SAFETY

From 2020 to 2025, crashes in Oklahoma work zones resulted in 141 fatalities, including 131 fatalities of occupants of motor vehicles and 10 fatalities of non-occupants.<sup>9</sup> Unsafe speeds were cited as a factor in 33 percent of fatal work zone crashes, the highest contributing factor in these crashes.<sup>10</sup> Other factors included large truck involvement at 25 percent, driver inattention at 17 percent, and alcohol or drug impairment at 12 percent.<sup>11</sup> The Oklahoma Department of Transportation found that an analysis of at least four major work zones indicated that average vehicle speeds in the work zones were approximately one-third higher than posted speeds.<sup>12</sup>

**Chart 5. Oklahoma Work Zone Traffic Fatalities, 2020 to 2025.**

OKLAHOMA WORK ZONE FATALITIES			
Year	Vehicle Occupant Fatalities	Non-Occupant Fatalities	Total Fatalities
2020	17	1	18
2021	25	4	29
2022	15	1	16
2023	32	1	33
2024	25	2	27
2025	17	1	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>141</b>

Source: Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

The safe and efficient movement of vehicles through roadway work zones is a critical priority for transportation officials, the highway construction industry, police agencies, commercial motor carriers and the public. The Federal Highway Administration [Work Zone Management Program](#) strives to provide transportation practitioners with high-quality products, tools, and information to assist in planning, designing, and implementing safer, more efficient, and less congested work zones

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.

ODOT operates a comprehensive Work Zone Review Program designed to ensure that active work zones across the state are safe, consistent and compliant. As part of this effort, trained reviewers drive through work zones to evaluate traffic control, verify MUTCD (Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices) compliance, and compare field conditions to the approved traffic control plans.<sup>13</sup> These observations help identify issues early and promote uniformity in work zones across the state.

ODOT has also implemented a program called Oklahoma Work Zone Safe to reach teen drivers aged 15-19 with three key principles in work zone safety: safe drivers, signs and laws, and the faces that serve us.<sup>14</sup>

## THE COST OF TRAFFIC CRASHES

Traffic crashes in the U.S. result in a significant economic burden. According to a [2023 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\) report](#), the tangible economic costs of traffic crashes can be estimated through empirical measurements, including 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.<sup>15</sup> 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 Oklahoma in 2024 resulted in a total cost of \$17 billion in the value of societal harm, which includes \$4.2 billion in economic costs and \$12.8 billion in quality-of-life costs.<sup>16</sup>

## FACTORS IMPACTING OKLAHOMA TRAFFIC FATALITIES

Beginning in March 2020, when initial restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic were implemented, the number and rate of traffic fatalities in Oklahoma and throughout the U.S. began to increase.

This significant increase in traffic fatalities, which started with 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 (NHTSA) 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 other drugs."<sup>17</sup>

NHTSA data indicates that in 2024, 86.4 percent of Oklahomans wore seat belts compared to a national average of 91.2 percent.<sup>18</sup> Of passenger vehicle occupants killed in traffic crashes in Oklahoma in 2023, 44 percent were unrestrained, the same percentage as the national average.<sup>19</sup> NHTSA data indicates that 55 percent of motorcyclists killed in traffic crashes in Oklahoma in 2023 were not wearing helmets, significantly higher than the national average of 34 percent.<sup>20</sup>

NHTSA found that in 2023, 25 percent of drivers in fatal traffic crashes in Oklahoma were alcohol impaired, lower than the national average of 30 percent.<sup>21</sup> NHTSA also found that 32 percent of 2023 traffic fatalities in Oklahoma were speed related, compared to 29 percent nationally.<sup>22</sup>

### A PRESCRIPTION FOR REDUCING U.S. TRAFFIC FATALITIES

In 2022 the U.S. Department of Transportation adopted a [National Roadway Safety Strategy](#), a comprehensive roadmap for addressing the nation’s roadway safety crisis based on a [Safe System Approach](#) that acknowledges the following: humans make mistakes and are physically vulnerable; traffic deaths and serious injuries are unacceptable; traffic deaths and serious injuries need to be reduced by the provision of a redundant transportation system that reduces or minimizes crashes and ensures that, if crashes do occur, they do not result in serious injury or death.<sup>23</sup>

Successfully implementing the safe system approach will require complimentary actions by governmental, non-profit, private, healthcare and academic organizations.

**Chart 6. The Safe System Approach.**



**Source: U.S. Department of Transportation.**

The Safe System Approach, which is also being adopted by state and local transportation agencies has five objectives:

- [Safer People](#): Encourage safe, responsible behavior by people who use our roads, and create conditions that prioritize their ability to reach their destination unharmed.
- [Safer Roads](#): Design roadway environments to mitigate human mistakes and account for injury tolerances, to encourage safer behaviors, and to 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.
- [Safer Speeds](#): Promote safer speeds in all roadway environments through a combination of thoughtful, context-appropriate roadway design, targeted education and outreach campaigns, and enforcement.

- [Post-Crash Care](#): Enhance the survivability of crashes through expedient access to emergency medical care, while creating a safe working environment for vital first responders and preventing secondary crashes through robust traffic incident management practices.

Improving safety on the nation’s roadways will require that additional steps are taken to make further progress in achieving the objectives of the Safe System Approach. NHTSA, which provides states with roadway safety grants, requires states to submit a [state highway safety plan](#). The state plans outline numerous steps states are taking to improve traffic safety. Elements of these state roadway safety plans aimed at addressing the Safe System objectives include:

- Safer People: education on speeding, impaired or distracted driving; education on safe pedestrian and bicycling behavior; education on driving safely around large commercial vehicles; enforcement of commercial driver license and vehicle weight requirements; extension of safety belt laws and their enforcement to include all passenger vehicle occupants; enhancing enforcement action of speeding, impaired, aggressive and distracted driving, particularly at high-risk locations; increase penalties, particularly for repeat offender drivers; and increased enforcement at work zones.
- Safer Roads: converting intersections to roundabouts; removing or shielding roadside objects; the addition of left-turn lanes at intersections; improved signalization and lighting at intersections; adding or improving median barriers; improved roadway lighting; adding centerline or shoulder rumble strips; improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities, including sidewalks and bike lanes and providing pedestrian crossing islands; improved work zone safety measures; wider lanes and paved shoulders; upgrading roads from two lanes to four lanes; providing or improving lane markings; updating rail crossings; eliminating vertical pavement drop-offs; and providing large truck parking spaces.
- Safer Vehicles: 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: Reduce crash response time including the use of emergency vehicle preemption technology; improve emergency response to multi-vehicle or hazardous material crashes; and increase access to level one or two trauma centers for seriously-injured crash victims.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) prepared an [analysis](#) of the effectiveness of 28 proven safety countermeasures that offer significant and measurable impacts to improving roadway safety.

The report, titled “[Making Our Roads Safer: One Countermeasure at a Time](#),” provides descriptions of effective roadway safety measures and estimates of likely safety benefits. The following chart describes some of the critical roadway safety improvements included in the report and the resulting benefits.

**Chart 7. Effective Safety Countermeasures.**

<b>Roadway Countermeasure</b>	<b>Documented Benefits</b>
<b>Application of pavement friction treatments</b>	Reduce total crashes at intersections by 20%
<b>Bicycle lanes</b>	Reduce bicycle/vehicle crashes by 53%
<b>Center-line rumble strips</b>	Reduce head-on fatal and injury crashes on rural two-lane roads by 44-64%
<b>Crosswalk Visibility Enhancements</b>	Reduce pedestrian injury crashes by 40%
<b>Dedicated left-turn lanes</b>	Reduce fatal and injury crashes by 36%
<b>Improved lane markings and signage at intersections</b>	Reduce injury and fatal crashes by 10% at all intersections and by 27% at rural intersections.
<b>Improved lighting at intersections</b>	Reduce nighttime crashes on rural and urban highways by 28%
<b>Improved lighting, markings and signalization at crosswalks</b>	Reduce pedestrian injury crashes by 40%
<b>Improved signage and lane markings at curves</b>	Reduce non-intersection fatal and injury crashes by 16%
<b>Pavement friction management</b>	Reduce intersection crashes by 20%
<b>Retroreflective backplates on traffic signals</b>	Reduce crashes by 15%
<b>Roundabouts</b>	Reduce fatal and injury crashes by 82%
<b>Sidewalks</b>	Reduce crashes involving pedestrians walking along the roadways by 65-89%
<b>Wider edge lanes</b>	Reduce fatal and injury crashes on rural two-lane roads by 37%

Source: USDOT.

### **IMPROVING ROADWAY SAFETY IN OKLAHOMA**

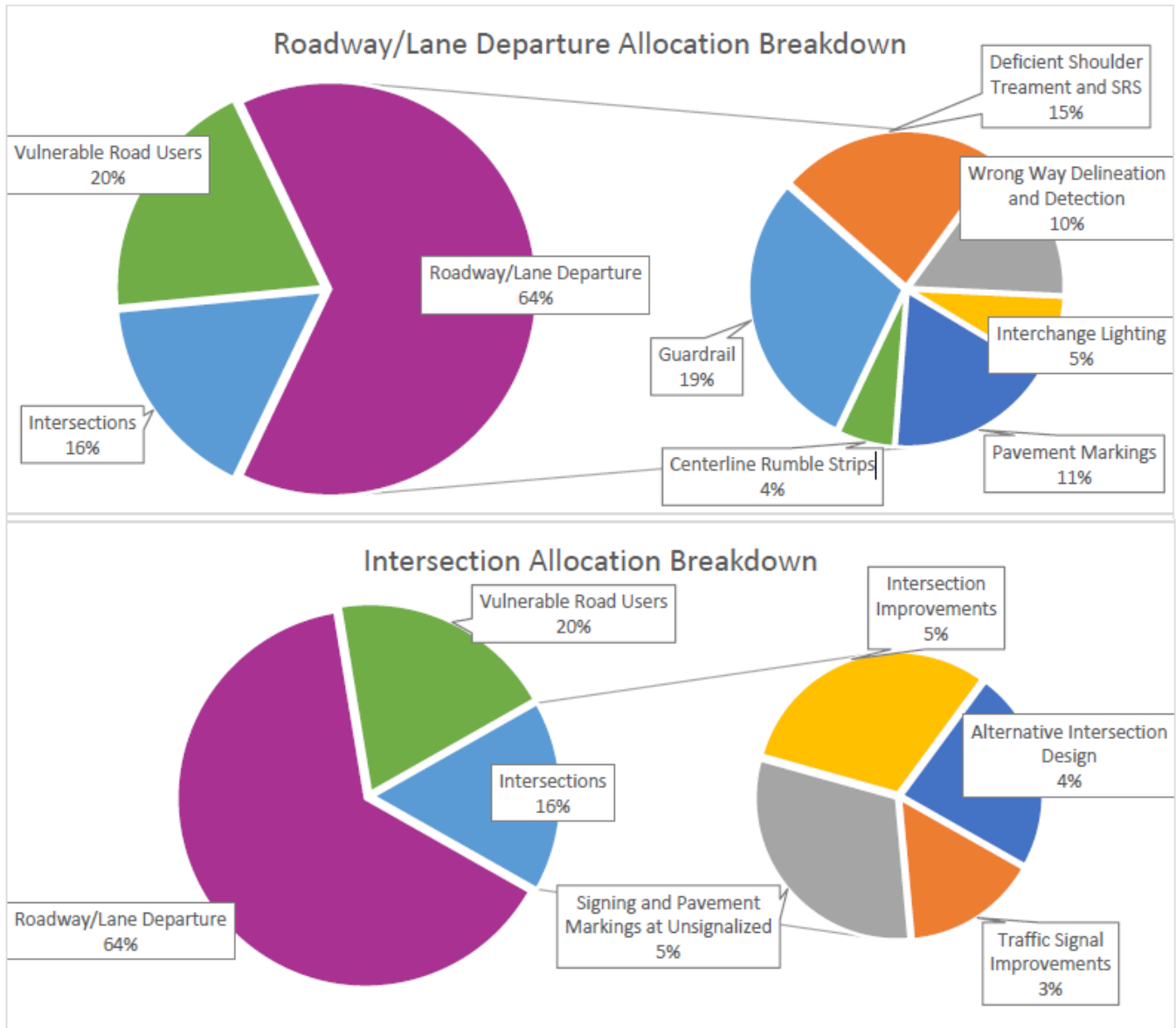
ODOT is implementing a [Strategic Highway Safety Plan](#) to meet its goal of reducing traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries, emphasizing the following eight areas: lane departures; impaired driving; occupant protection; unsafe speeds; intersections; commercial motor vehicles crashes and work zones; motorcycle crashes and all-terrain vehicles; and vulnerable road users.<sup>24</sup>

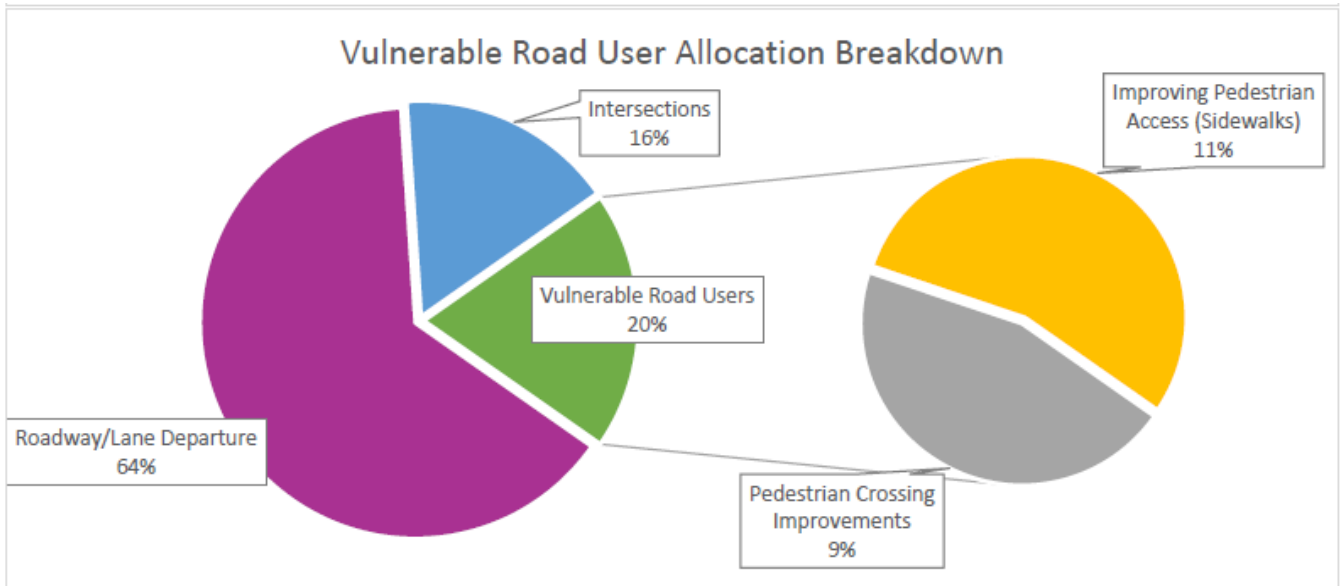
As part of its commitment to improving traffic safety, ODOT’s design and construction standards include safety criteria and countermeasures, which are incorporated in every construction project. Safety is a top priority in ODOT’s project development, with alternative options evaluated using tools such as crash modification factors and safety performance measures. As an example, updates and changes to rumble strip standards as well as consideration of rumble strips on all possible projects have contributed to improved roadway safety in Oklahoma.<sup>25</sup>

ODOT has implemented a rural two-lane advancement and management plan to address the 5,160 miles of two-lane roadways in the state with deficient shoulders.<sup>26</sup> ODOT has set a goal to reduce the number of miles of two-lane roadways with deficient shoulders by ten percent every four years.<sup>27</sup>

ODOT invested \$39 million in 2025 on projects designed to improve roadway safety for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists. Sixty-four percent of that funding was designated for projects to reduce roadway/lane vehicle departures, 16 percent to improve intersection safety, and 20 percent to improve safety for vulnerable road users (pedestrians and bicyclists).<sup>28</sup> The following charts detail additional breakdowns on ODOT’s 2025 safety spending.

**Chart 8. ODOT Traffic Safety Spending 2025.**





Source: Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

### CONCLUSION

Oklahoma faces a roadway safety crisis, with motorist, motorcyclist, pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities since 2020, averaging 688 per year. The tremendous toll of fatalities and serious injuries that occur on Oklahoma’s roadways are a significant economic and, more critically, personal burden on Oklahomans.

Addressing Oklahoma’s traffic safety challenge will require a comprehensive approach based on a belief that deaths and serious injuries on our roadways are unacceptable, and that people will make mistakes, but those mistakes should not lead to death or serious injury. Making a commitment to eliminating fatal and serious injuries on Oklahoma’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.

###

## ENDNOTES

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) 2026. Traffic Volume Trends. [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/travel\\_monitoring/tvt.cfm](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/travel_monitoring/tvt.cfm)
- <sup>2</sup> Oklahoma Department of Transportation (2026). Response to TRIP survey.
- <sup>3</sup> TRIP analysis of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and FHWA data (2025).
- <sup>4</sup> Federal Highway Administration. Highway Statistics, 2023.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> TRIP analysis of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Data, 2019-2023.
- <sup>8</sup> Oklahoma Department of Transportation (2026). Response to TRIP survey.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Oklahoma Department of Transportation (2026). Work Zone Safety presentation.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Oklahoma Department of Transportation.
- <sup>14</sup> Oklahoma Department of Transportation Strategic Highway Safety Plan (2023). P. 45. [ODOT 2023-2028 Strategic Highway Safety Plan.pdf](#)
- <sup>15</sup> The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019 (Revised) (2023). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/>
- <sup>16</sup> TRIP analysis based on The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019 (Revised) (2023). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019 \(Revised\) \(dot.gov\)](#) and travel data from the Federal Highway Administration and inflation data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis.
- <sup>17</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2021). Continuation of Research on Traffic Safety During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency: January – June 2021. [https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2021-10/Traffic-Safety-During-COVID-19\\_Jan-June2021-102621-v3-tag.pdf](https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2021-10/Traffic-Safety-During-COVID-19_Jan-June2021-102621-v3-tag.pdf)
- <sup>18</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2026). Seat Belt Use in 2024 – Use Rates in the States and Territories. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813766>
- <sup>19</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2025). State Traffic Data. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813743>
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation National Roadway Safety Strategy, 2022. <https://www.transportation.gov/NRSS>
- <sup>24</sup> Oklahoma Department of Transportation (2023). Oklahoma Department of Transportation Strategic Highway Safety Plan. P. 2. [ODOT 2023-2028 Strategic Highway Safety Plan.pdf](#)
- <sup>25</sup> Oklahoma Highway Safety Improvement Program (2025). Oklahoma Department of Transportation. P. 6.
- <sup>26</sup> Oklahoma Highway Safety Improvement Program (2025). Oklahoma Department of Transportation. P. 6.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.