



TRANSPORTATION

Pedestrian death surge spurs highway safety officials to sound alarm

3,434 pedestrians were struck and killed on U.S. roads in the first half of 2022.



Austin Jenkins

02:53 PM, Feb 28, 2023

Caution tape covers the corner of Bay Ridge Avenue and 5th Avenue where pedestrians were struck on Monday, Feb. 13, 2023, in the Brooklyn borough of New York. Police have stopped a U-Haul truck and detained the driver after reports that the vehicle struck multiple pedestrians on Monday. (AP Photo/Brittainy Newman)

An alarming spike in pedestrian deaths is prompting state highway safety officials to call for a “multi-layered safety net” to better protect vulnerable road users.

In the first six months of 2022, at least 3,434 pedestrians were struck and killed on U.S. roads, up 5% from the previous year, according to [preliminary estimates](#) released Tuesday by the Governors Highway Safety Association.



“There is a pedestrian safety crisis on our roads, and it’s only gotten worse since the start of the pandemic,” Jonathan Adkins, GHSA’s CEO, said in a statement accompanying the report. “A single roadway death is tragic. But it’s absolutely mind-boggling and heartbreaking that drivers are killing an average of 19 pedestrians every single day.”

Florida, Virginia, Oregon, Illinois and Pennsylvania logged the largest year-over-year increases in the number of fatalities for the first half of 2022, the report found. Ohio, Louisiana, Michigan, Texas and Kansas led the 21 states and Washington, D.C., that saw a decrease in deaths. Data from Oklahoma was not available for the study.

The greatest number of deaths occurred in California, Florida and Texas, which together have 28% of the U.S. population but accounted for 38% of the pedestrian fatalities, the report said.

GHSA attributes the trend to a combination of factors including heavier vehicles, poor roadway design, a lack of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and an increase in dangerous driving that [coincided](#) with the pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has also [identified](#) speeding and alcohol as significant factors in pedestrian deaths. In 2019, 46% of fatal pedestrian crashes involved alcohol.

“The only way to reverse this awful trend is to do more of everything that works — more and better designed infrastructure to keep people walking safe, equitable enforcement of traffic safety laws to stop dangerous driving and engaging more communities where the impacts of this crisis are felt the hardest,” Adkins said in his statement.

[GHSA](#), which represents state highway safety offices, has endorsed what is called the “Safe System Approach” to combat pedestrian deaths. That involves designing roadways and pedestrian routes to account for the reality that humans will make mistakes. To reduce injuries and deaths, one of the goals is to separate cars from pedestrians and other vulnerable road users as much as possible.

Last year, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg announced a [National Roadway Safety Strategy](#), which incorporates the “Safe System Approach” first [developed](#) in Sweden in the mid-1990s.

“We will work with every level of government and industry to deliver results, because every driver, passenger, and pedestrian should be certain that they’re going to arrive at their destination safely, every time,” Buttigieg [said](#) at the time.

Buttigieg’s announcement followed passage of the \$1.2 trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which included [\\$284 billion](#) in new



pedestrian and bicycle safety, as well as to create safe routes to school, among other priorities.

The initial round of grants was [announced](#) on Feb. 1. The infrastructure law also includes \$4 billion more for the nation's Highway Safety Improvement Program.

In addition, the infrastructure law requires [upgraded national standards](#) for how roads are designed to include new protections for pedestrians and cyclists. The law also gives the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration [authority](#) to require that automakers install myriad safety systems on new vehicles, including advanced drunk driving prevention technology and automatic emergency braking.

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