

## USDOT Releases New Data Showing That Road Fatalities Spiked in First Half of 2021

Secretary Buttigieg calls rising traffic deaths a crisis and calls for cooperation among all levels of government, industry, and advocacy to change course

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The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration today released the [\*Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities for the First Half \(January-June\) of 2021\*](#), which shows the largest six-month increase ever recorded in the Fatality Analysis Reporting System's history. An estimated 20,160 people died in motor vehicle crashes in the first half of 2021, up 18.4% over 2020. That's the largest number of projected fatalities in that time period since 2006.

"This is a crisis. More than 20,000 people died on U.S. roads in the first six months of 2021, leaving countless loved ones behind. We cannot and should not accept these fatalities as simply a part of everyday life in America," said United States Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. "Today we are announcing that we will produce the Department's first ever National Roadway Safety Strategy to identify action steps for everyone working to save lives on the road. No one will accomplish this alone. It will take all levels of government, industries, advocates, engineers, and communities across the country working together toward the day when family members no longer have to say goodbye to loved ones because of a traffic crash."

In addition to the traffic fatality data, NHTSA also released [\*behavioral research findings from March 2020 through June 2021\*](#), indicating that incidents of speeding and traveling without a seatbelt remain higher than during pre-pandemic times.

"The report is sobering. It's also a reminder of what hundreds of millions of people can do every day, right now, to combat this: Slow down, wear seat belts, drive sober, and avoid distractions behind the wheel," said NHTSA Deputy Administrator Dr. Steven Cliff. "All of us must work together to stop aggressive, dangerous driving and help prevent fatal crashes."

Preliminary data from the Federal Highway Administration show that vehicle miles traveled in the first half of 2021 increased by about 173.1 billion miles, or about 13%. The fatality rate for the first half of 2021 increased to 1.34 fatalities per 100 million VMT, up from the projected rate of 1.28 fatalities per 100 million VMT in the first half of 2020.

"Safer roads and safer speeds are key parts of addressing this crisis of fatalities and serious injuries on our roadways," said Acting FHWA Administrator Stephanie Pollack. "FHWA is committed to a Safe System Approach and to working closely with local and state transportation agencies to make every road that is designed or built with federal funds safe for everyone who uses it."

The Department's first ever National Roadway Safety Strategy will bring together work being done across USDOT and will put forth a comprehensive set of actions to significantly reduce serious injuries and deaths on our nation's roadways. The strategy will recognize that, while the Department has an important leadership role to play in addressing this crisis, it will take concerted and coordinated effort across all levels of government, the private sector, and communities to reverse the current trend. The strategy will be released in January.

The strategy will be rooted in the Safe System Approach principles and identifies significant actions the Department will take to help ensure: Safer People, Safer Roads, Safer Vehicles, Safer Speeds, and Post-Crash Care. The strategy will focus on new priorities that target our most significant and urgent problems, and are expected to have the most substantial impact.

Even while the National Roadway Safety Strategy is being prepared, the Federal Highway Administration has accelerated two proven programs focused on highway safety. The Focused Approach to Safety Program has notified 15 states and Puerto Rico – who together account for roughly half of nationwide road fatalities – that they will receive technical assistance resources to address the most common types of crashes that result in fatalities (roadway departures, intersection crashes, and pedestrian/bicycle crashes). Today, FHWA is also issuing nine new Proven Safety Countermeasures, which are road design elements that are proven to make roads safer for all users, but are underutilized. The new Proven Safety Countermeasures supported by FHWA are: rectangular rapid flashing beacons, crosswalk visibility enhancements, bicycle lanes, lighting, pavement friction management, wider edge lines, variable speed limits, appropriate speed limit-setting, and speed safety cameras. With these additions, there are now a total of 28 Proven Safety Countermeasures.

You can find information on all of the Proven Safety Countermeasures FHWA supports at: <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/>. Information on FHWA's Focused Approach to Safety Program can be found at <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/fas/>.

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