Smart Growth America

National Complete Streets Coalition

DANGEROUS BY DESIGN 2026

Acknowledgments

Smart Growth America helps create healthy, prosperous, and resilient places to live for all people through research, advocacy, and direct community support. Our work spans housing and land use, transportation, and economic development to find solutions to communities' most pressing needs. We work with elected officials at all levels, real estate developers, chambers of commerce, transportation and urban planning professionals, and residents to improve everyday life for people across the country through better development. Learn more at www.smartgrowthamerica.org.

The **National Complete Streets Coalition**, a program of Smart Growth America, is a non-profit, non-partisan alliance of public interest organizations and transportation professionals committed to the development and implementation of Complete Streets policies and practices. A nationwide movement launched by the Coalition in 2004, Complete Streets is the integration of people and place in the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of transportation networks. www.completestreets.org

Project Team

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Support for Dangerous by Design 2026 was provided in part by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

SGA and NCSC also thank Peter Quintanilla, Chris Rall, Matthew Roe, Peter Simmeth, and Joe Tucker for providing photographs used in this report. Additional graphic development support was provided by Michael Baker International.

Photo credits: Cody Nottingham, Lexington, KY (cover); Peter Simmeth, Eugene, OR (p. 2); Matthew Roe, Schenectady, Niskayuna, and Syracuse, NY (pp. 3, 4, 5, and 9); Chris Rall, Eugene, OR (p. 6); Peter Quintanilla (pp. 5 and 10); Joe Tucker, Akron, OH (p. 13). Additional photos from Little Rock, AR; Eugene, OR; Harrisonburg, VA; Anchorage, AK; and San Antonio, TX are courtesy of Smart Growth America (pp. 5, 11, 12, 14, and 21).

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Schenectady, NY

Welcome to Dangerous by Design

In April 2026, Jonathan Morrison, administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, boldly declared that **"American roads are safer"** as he announced a staggering total of **39,254 people killed in 2024,** including 7,080 people struck and killed while walking.

The 72 percent increase in pedestrian fatalities in the 15 years from 2009 to 2024 outpaces both the growth in population and vehicle miles traveled. While pedestrian deaths have in fact decreased slightly for two straight years (2022 to 2024), 2024's total is higher than ***every year on record since 1982,*** *other than the modern-day historic highs experienced from 2021 to 2023.*

Why is the agency charged with saving lives and preventing injuries on our roadways celebrating such carnage?

Slightly less deadly is not the same thing as safe. The families and friends of those 39,254 people killed certainly would not agree. This definition of "progress" treats tens of thousands of fatalities as an acceptable baseline. And despite recent, small year-to-year decreases, the deaths of people walking have been on a decades-long climb. We should **not** be celebrating a modest 3.9 percent decrease from 2023-24 considering that we are still nowhere close to 2019 levels when 6,200 total deaths of people walking led to **headlines bemoaning this historic high.** Why is anyone celebrating 7,080 deaths now—a catastrophic number that is higher than all but three years of the last 40-plus years?

39K+

PEOPLE KILLED ON U.S. ROADS IN 2024

7,080

PEDESTRIANS STRUCK AND KILLED IN 2024

▲ 72%

INCREASE IN PEDESTRIAN FATALITIES SINCE 2009

▼ 6%

DECREASE IN FATALITIES FROM 2022 TO 2024

Even if pedestrian fatalities keep declining at the current rate, we wouldn't reach 2009 levels until 2042.

And in the meantime, 96,615 more people would be killed while walking on U.S. roads. This is the equivalent of wiping the population of Asheville, NC, off the map because the country failed to commit to globally accepted best practices already proven to save lives.

The share of all traffic fatalities that were people walking also reached a new high in 2024, nearing one in every five roadway fatalities.

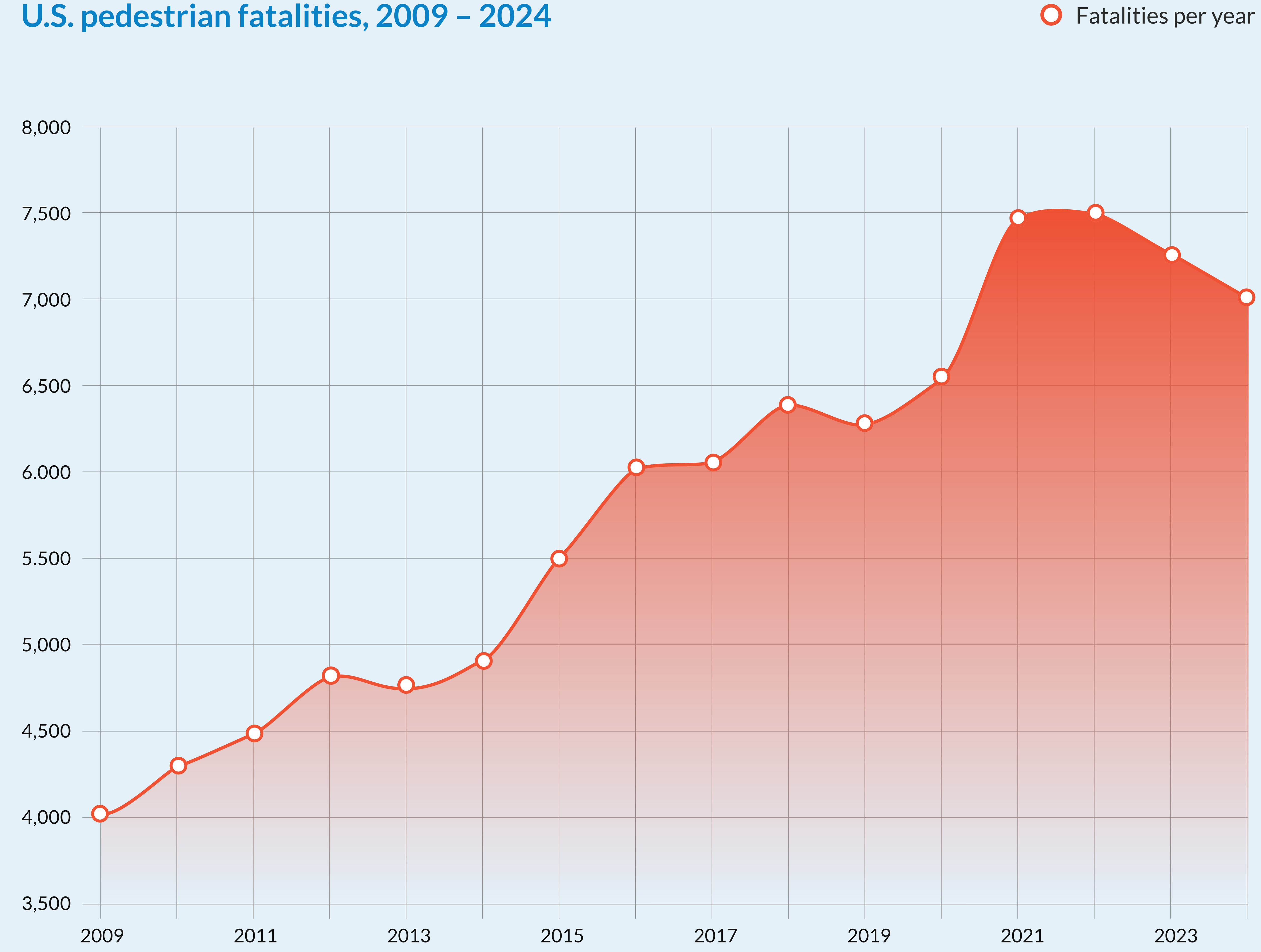
Transportation decision makers continue to lower their standards for roadway safety. Though the federal government and transportation agencies at every level claim safety is their top priority, this hasn't produced sufficient change in how roads are designed, how transportation dollars are spent, and how success is measured.

When it comes to roadway safety, especially for people walking, zero has become a tagline rather than an actual target to meet by deploying all available resources and strategies in service of that goal.

The number of people killed while walking has been one of the clearest measures of whether our transportation system is working for everyone. The 7,080 people killed while walking in 2024 makes it clear it is not.

Niskayuna, NY

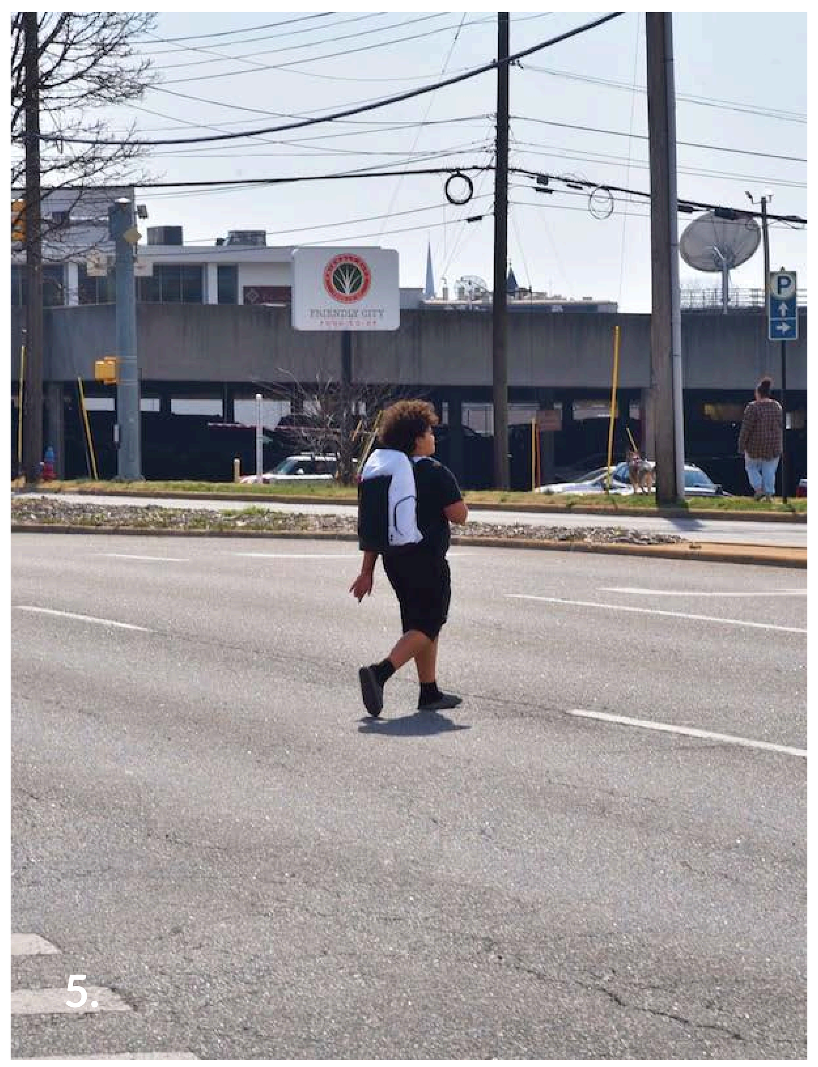
U.S. pedestrian fatalities, 2009 – 2024



These precious lives lost and mourned are a symptom of a transportation system that, from policymakers to practitioners, is failing to live up to its end of the bargain by producing a safe system with taxpayer money. This broken agreement is costing thousands of people their lives every year.

Across the country, roads continue to be designed that prioritize vehicle speed over safety —and everything else. Outdated design standards that produce dangerous speeds in places where people are present, too-wide lanes, infrequent pedestrian crossings, and poor visibility continue to produce the deadly outcomes they were built to prevent. After decades of preventable deaths, insufficient policy change, and broken promises, our streets are still dangerous by design.

How we design our roads sends clear messages about who belongs where, how they are expected to behave, and whose safety matters.



The most dangerous streets—streets like these—communicate that people who walk do not matter to those with the power to make change.

Our transportation system has always asked communities to accept certain tradeoffs. Thousands of preventable deaths every year should never be one of them.

Photos: 1. Syracuse, NY 2. Birmingham, AL 4. Eugene, OR 5. Harrisonburg, VA 6. Anchorage, AK

The hidden costs of the pedestrian safety crisis

In 2024, Smart Growth America explored three hidden costs of the pedestrian safety crisis: injuries that go undercounted or unreported, trips not taken due to fear of being killed, and the loved ones and communities left behind. While these issues are not explored at length in this edition, they have not gone away and have only likely grown in significance.

Speed OR Safety

Why we call the report Dangerous by Design

The thesis of this report is that our streets are ***dangerous by design***, built to prioritize the speed and convenience of cars over the safety of everyone who uses them. This report focuses on street design because it shapes driver behavior in invisible but powerful ways, yet receives far less attention than other aspects of safety, like enforcing the law and teaching and educating people on the rules of the road. Street design informs how fast people drive, where people cross the street, and how to accommodate other modes. While speed limit signs may be posted only every few blocks or miles, the road's design is always present, providing guidance and visual cues that shape behavior in powerful ways that most people do not realize.

Since the 1950s, the primary goal for transportation has been to move vehicles quickly in nearly all contexts, and 70 years of street design reflects those choices. When roads are wide and straight, lanes are wide and plentiful, and intersections are infrequent or non-signalized, people feel comfortable driving faster—even when the speed limit is low.

The result can be streets that are terrifying for people walking. Long crossing distances, infrequent signals, and high-speed turns force pedestrians to take their lives into their hands simply to reach the other side of the street. While marked intersections may try to guide people to cross at those locations, they are not nearly as effective when located far apart. Those who do try to obey the rules of the road find themselves deeply inconvenienced, adding distance and time to their trips.

A transportation system designed primarily for speed will inevitably produce deadly outcomes. And when crashes happen, we blame drivers or pedestrians instead of the transportation agencies and design choices that made those outcomes far more likely in the first place.

Exploring the data

Eugene, OR

The deadliest places in America

Dangerous by Design 2026 ranks states and the largest 101 metro areas by pedestrian fatality rates. Every one of them is too dangerous for people walking.

This report examines a five-year period (2020-2024) to provide a clearer picture of long-term road safety trends. While a one-year decline in deaths may seem like progress, looking at five-year trends reveals the full scope of the crisis—and how far the U.S. still has to go before our roads can be considered safe. To measure long-term trends, we compare the average rates for 2015-19 to 2020-24.

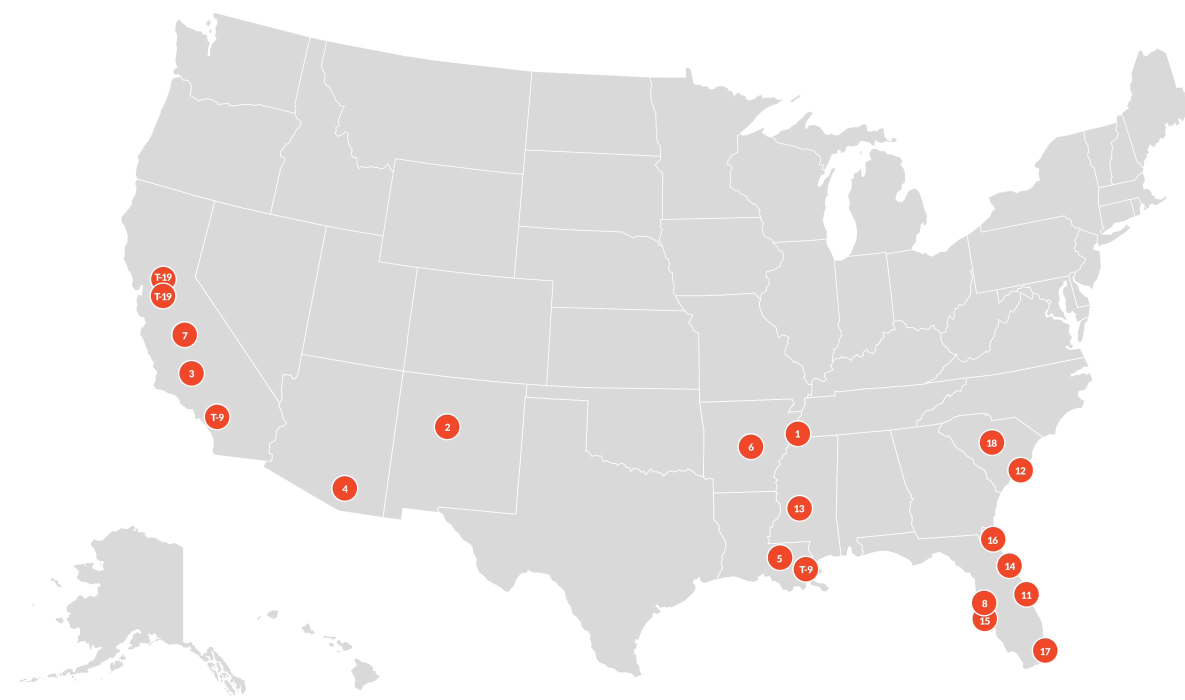
Why and how Dangerous by Design measures fatality rates

The U.S. is one of the few countries to publish fatality data using deaths per vehicle miles traveled (VMT), which dilutes the reality of each death. This means that if the absolute number of deaths increases, but driving increases more, the country's streets are somehow deemed "safer." Writer David Zipper compares this to "trying to reduce the number of cancer deaths per cigarette smoked." Most other countries and even many U.S. researchers prefer per capita rates, which are a more direct measure of relative safety.

Using VMT allows transportation agencies to claim "improved" safety rates not by saving lives, but by making people drive more often and taking longer trips to reach essential destinations. Requiring everyone to drive more to make streets "safer" fails on both safety and on creating a transportation system that works. Dangerous by Design uses per capita fatality rates (deaths per 100,000 people) because it is a more accurate representation of the risk faced by people on foot each day.

Top 20 deadliest metros

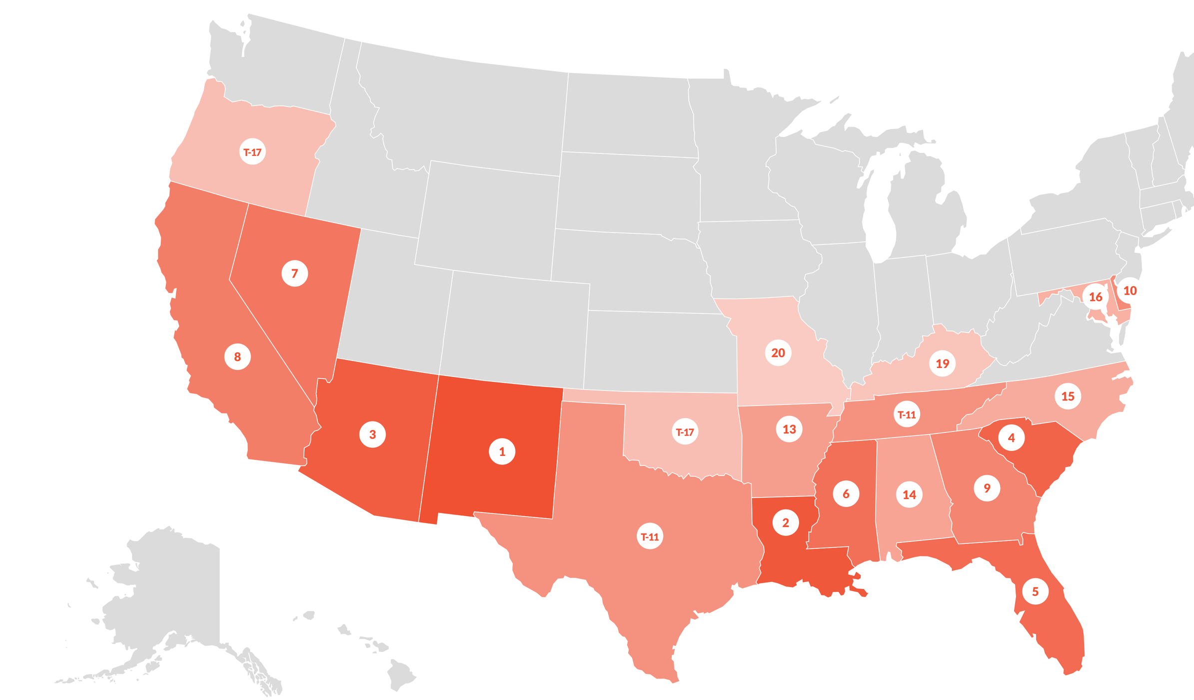
The 20 deadliest metro areas for people walking, ranked by average annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100,000 residents. Seventeen of this year's deadliest 20 metro areas also appeared in the 2024 edition of Dangerous by Design.



Rank	Metro Area	Avg. annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100k people (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2015-2019)	Long term trend in fatality rate
1	Memphis, TN-MS-AR	5.5	369	221	2.2 ▲
2	Albuquerque, NM	5.32	245	176	1.46 ▲
3	Bakersfield-Delano, CA	5.01	229	153	1.56 ▲
4	Tucson, AZ	4.43	235	142	1.67 ▲
5	Baton Rouge, LA	4.18	183	115	1.49 ▲
6	Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway, AR	4.17	158	79	2.03 ▲
7	Fresno, CA	4.06	239	137	1.28 ▲
8	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	3.74	618	557	0.14 ▲
T-9	New Orleans-Metairie, LA	3.73	183	145	1.44 ▲
T-9	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	3.73	871	680	0.75 ▲
11	Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, FL	3.7	117	98	0.35 ▲
12	Charleston-North Charleston, SC	3.69	154	125	0.46 ▲
13	Jackson, MS	3.66	112	74	1.18 ▲
14	Deltona-Daytona Beach-Ormond Beach, FL	3.6	127	126	-0.3 ▼
15	North Port-Bradenton-Sarasota, FL	3.44	153	119	0.48 ▲
16	Jacksonville, FL	3.41	287	262	-0.08 ▼
17	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	3.4	1062	945	0.3 ▲
18	Columbia, SC	3.32	141	119	0.43 ▲
T-19	Sacramento-Roseville-Folsom, CA	3.21	389	284	0.76 ▲
T-19	Stockton-Lodi, CA	3.21	128	128	-0.24 ▼

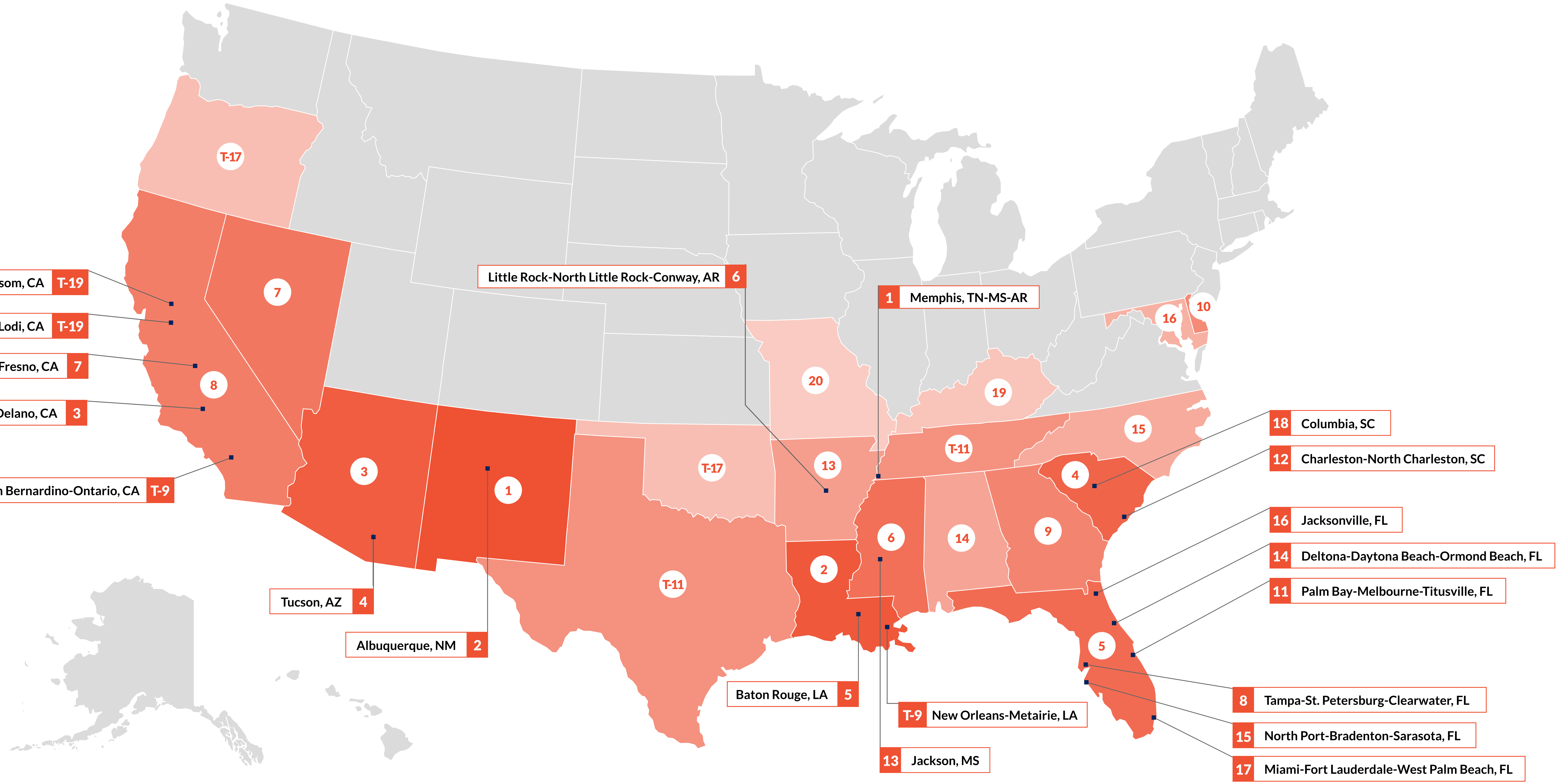
Top 20 deadliest states

The 20 deadliest states for people walking, ranked by average annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100,000 residents. Eighteen of this year's deadliest 20 states also appeared in the 2024 edition of Dangerous by Design.



Rank	State name	Avg. annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100k people (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2015-2019)	Long term trend in fatality rate
1	New Mexico	4.42	469	369	0.89 ▲
2	Louisiana	3.53	813	630	0.83 ▲
3	Arizona	3.49	1288	1000	0.65 ▲
4	South Carolina	3.37	893	750	0.38 ▲
5	Florida	3.32	3726	3356	0.11 ▲
6	Mississippi	3.18	469	346	0.86 ▲
7	Nevada	2.88	458	378	0.34 ▲
8	California	2.82	5546	4681	0.44 ▲
9	Georgia	2.79	1527	1177	0.53 ▲
10	Delaware	2.74	140	151	-0.41 ▼
T-11	Tennessee	2.56	903	606	0.75 ▲
T-11	Texas	2.56	3865	3097	0.37 ▲
13	Arkansas	2.51	382	264	0.75 ▲
14	Alabama	2.34	594	563	0.03 ▲
15	North Carolina	2.3	1234	1025	0.3 ▲
16	Maryland	2.27	703	577	0.35 ▲
T-17	Oklahoma	2.24	452	382	0.3 ▲
T-17	Oregon	2.24	477	369	0.45 ▲
19	Kentucky	2.09	475	377	0.4 ▲
20	Missouri	2.06	637	500	0.42 ▲

The deadliest places in America



Metro Location: ■ Deadliest Metro Rankings: # *Metro Area Name* Deadliest State Rankings: #

Key findings

Niskayuna, NY

The rankings are only part of the story. Our key findings highlight who is most affected and where conditions continue to get worse.

A better ranking in this report doesn't mean that fewer people are dying

Frequent readers of Dangerous by Design may notice that some states and metro areas improved their spot in the rankings this year. That does not necessarily mean that conditions improved for pedestrians. Many of these places got more deadly, but their ranking improved only because other states or metros had bigger increases in their fatality rates.

For example, Charleston, SC moved down from #9 to #12. Tucson, AZ "improved" from #3 to #4. Neither is saving lives—on the contrary, 18 more people died on Tucson's roads (2015-19 vs 2020-24) while Charleston saw an increase of 5 deaths. These places did not get safer; other metro areas simply got worse faster.

Top 20 most dangerous metros: pedestrian deaths, then vs. now

Average annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100,000 residents among the 20 deadliest metro areas in each report.

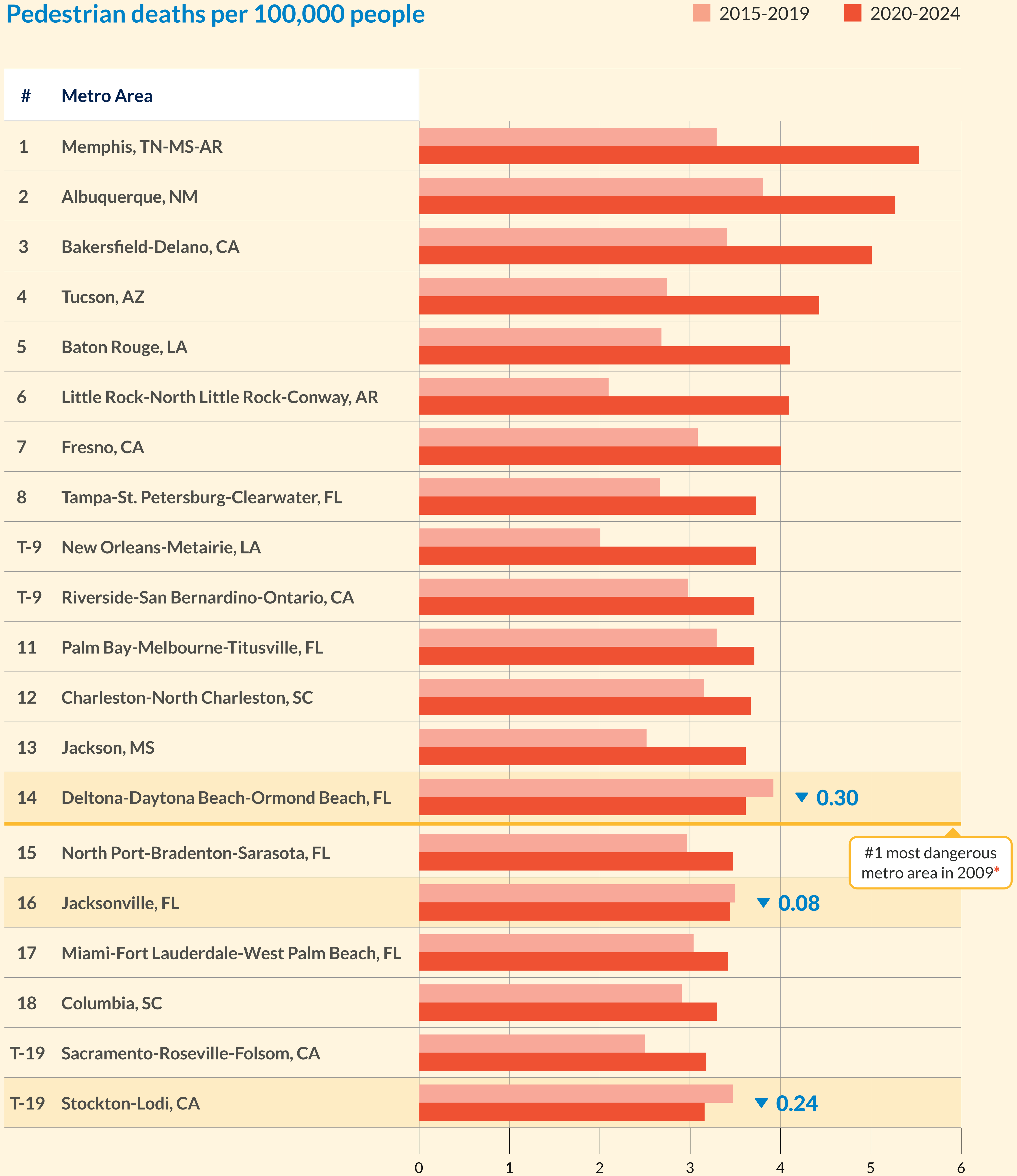
1.96

DANGEROUS BY DESIGN 2009 (2007–2008 AVERAGE)

3.93

DANGEROUS BY DESIGN 2026 (2020–2024 AVERAGE)

Pedestrian deaths per 100,000 people



The most dangerous places are getting far more dangerous

For a sobering look at how the rankings compare overall, note that the first time we ranked metro areas in the 2009 version of Dangerous by Design, no metro area had a pedestrian fatality rate higher than 3.52. This year's top 14 most dangerous metro areas have a higher rate than that and the top fatality rate of 5.5 in Memphis, TN is far more deadly than that now.

Only 18 of the 101 metro areas saw decreases in their pedestrian fatality rates

Of the 18 metro areas that improved their pedestrian fatality rates in our 2024 report, only 7 of those maintained their progress in this edition. One of the areas new to the list of improving metros is Orlando, Florida, a metro area that has consistently ranked in the top 20 most dangerous places. They now sit at #25, with one of the largest reductions in five-year fatality rates. They still have a long way to go—65 people were killed while walking in Orlando in 2024—but the places lowering their long-term rates are the ones being more intentional with their funding, adopting best practices, and making hard decisions about changing existing roadways. Their investments continue to pay off with lives saved.

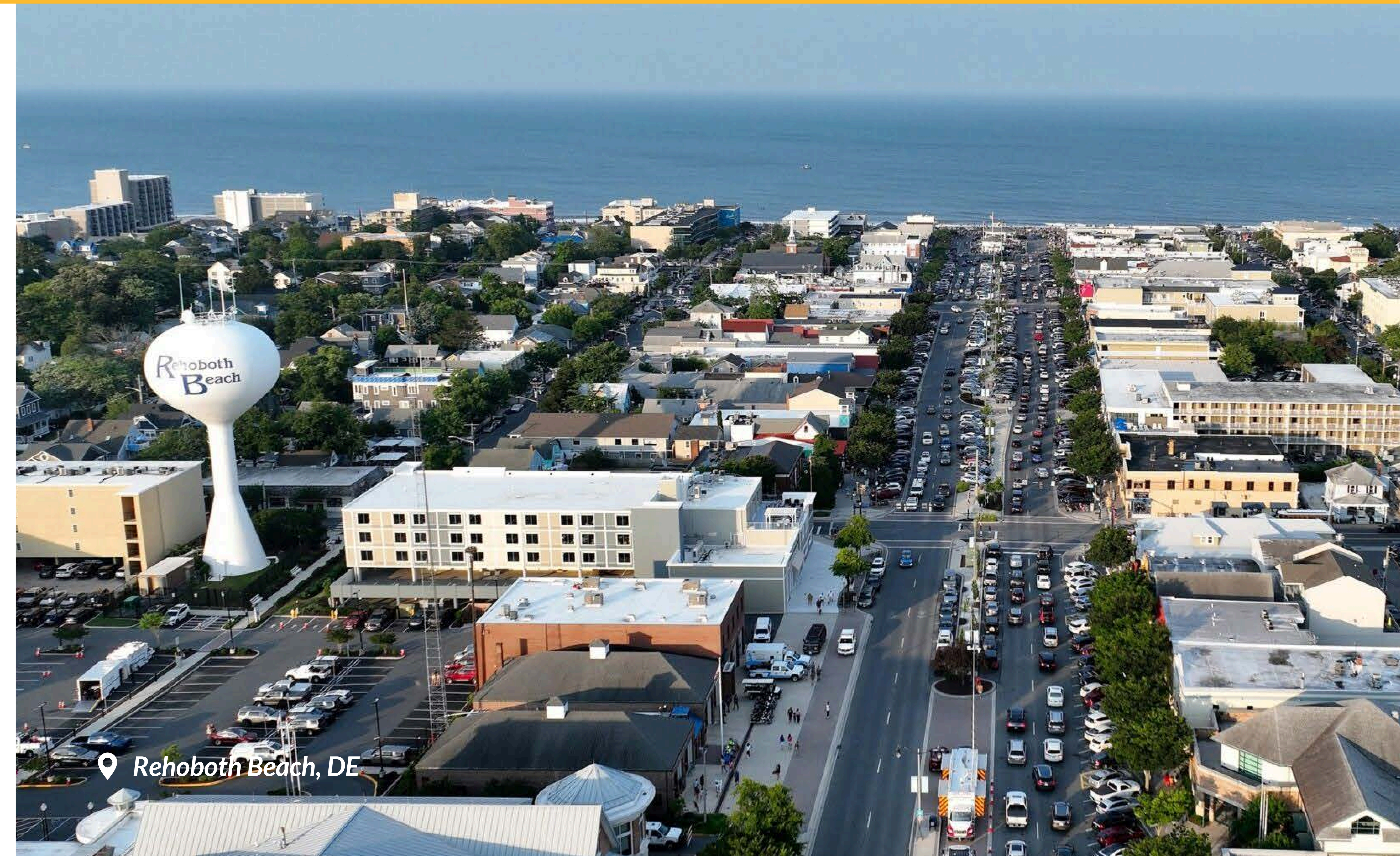
*

Every metro area above North Port (#15) is more deadly than the #1 most dangerous metro area in 2009

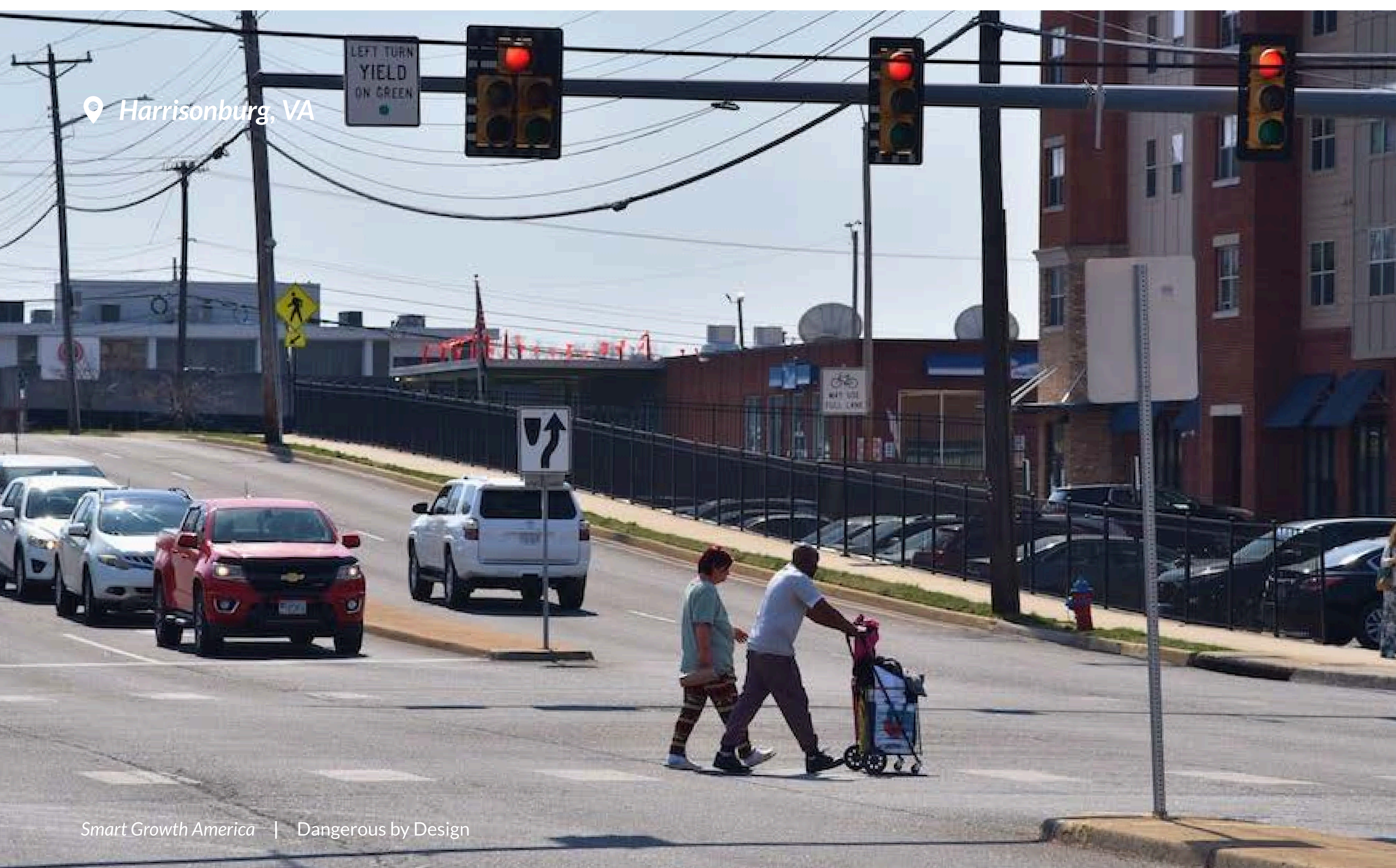
State departments of transportation have the power to significantly reduce pedestrian fatalities

Over half (3,609) of 2024's pedestrian fatalities took place on state-owned roads. State departments of transportation not only hold incredible amounts of funding and other resources, but they also set statewide design standards and can block much-needed progress on roads that serve both as local main streets and state connectors. If state DOTs acted upon their oft-stated priority of "safety first", they could save thousands of lives each year.

57% of all roadway fatalities occurred on state-owned roads in 2024.



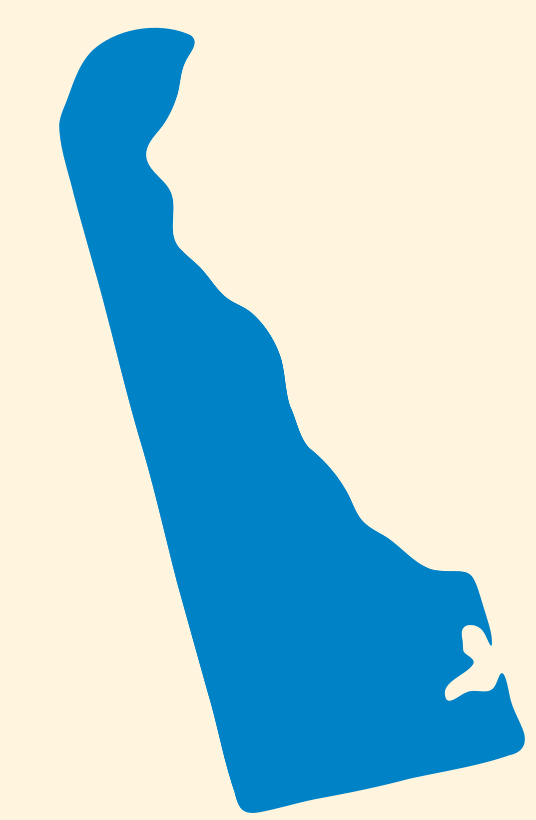
Rehoboth Beach, DE



Harrisonburg, VA

Delaware makes significant progress, but stays in the 20 most deadly states

Demonstrating the huge challenge that states have created for themselves, Delaware reduced their pedestrian fatality rate more than any other state, yet is still the 10th most deadly. Of the 20 most deadly states, 19 showed no signs of improvement or became even more dangerous. Only five states that improved in the 2024 report have continued to improve and build upon that progress in this report, and only eight states in total have improved since the last report when comparing five-year periods.



▼ 0.41%

DECREASE IN FATALITIES BETWEEN 2015-2019 AND 2020-2024

Little Rock, AR

The deadliest places remain stubbornly high

Memphis and New Mexico top the charts of the most dangerous metro areas and states, respectively.

Memphis, in the second straight report, ranks as the deadliest metro area for pedestrians in the United States, with a pedestrian fatality rate of 5.5. Between 2015 and 2019, Memphis averaged 44 pedestrian fatalities per year. From 2020-2024, that number surged to 74 annually, rising by an astonishing rate of 2.2 deaths per 100k people to reach 5.5 total in this report. Despite years of warnings and national attention, Memphis's streets continue to become more deadly for people walking.

For states, New Mexico continues to pull away as the deadliest in the country, with a pedestrian fatality rate of 4.42 per 100k people. The next-most-dangerous state—Louisiana—is nearly a full death per 100k people behind at 3.53. New Mexico has become so deadly that its rate from 2015-2019 would still top this year's list.

States trending most deadly between 2015-2019 and 2020-2024

New Mexico	▲ 0.89
Mississippi	▲ 0.86
Louisiana	▲ 0.83
Arkansas	▲ 0.75
Tennessee	▲ 0.75

Metros trending most deadly between 2015-19 and 2020-24

1	Memphis, TN-MS-AR	+2.2
2	Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway, AR	+2.03
3	Tucson, AZ	+1.67
4	Bakersfield-Delano, CA	+1.56
5	Baton Rouge, LA	+1.49

People of color and low-income communities continue to be killed at disproportionate rates

The disparities in pedestrian fatalities are not random. They are the predictable result of decades of transportation investment and design decisions that prioritize moving cars fast through communities that struggle to keep up. As the United States focused on the convenience of drivers and where they need and want to go, it did so at the cost of leaving lower-income communities and communities of color exposed to more dangerous roads.

Income

People who live in lower-income areas are disproportionately more likely to be hit and killed while walking. Fatality rates are the highest in the areas that have the lowest household incomes, which shows how dangerous roads and limited transportation options continue to have the biggest impact on those with lower incomes. These people may struggle to own today's increasingly expensive vehicles and are more likely to have no choice but to navigate long commutes on the most dangerous roads and lack better options for safe and convenient travel by transit or other means.

Race

American Indian and Alaska Native populations continue to experience the highest pedestrian fatality rates in the country, at 3.7 times the national average. Black Americans are killed while walking at 1.7 times the national average. Despite making up just 16 percent of the U.S. population, these two groups accounted for 22 percent of pedestrian deaths between 2020 and 2024. These disparities reflect decades of transportation decisions that concentrated dangerous roadway conditions in historically underserved communities and whose voices are still not represented in decision-making processes.

Pedestrian deaths per 100,000 by race and ethnicity (2020-2024)

American Indian and Alaska Native	7.9
Black or African American	3.67
Total U.S. Pedestrian Fatality Rate	2.15
Hispanic or Latino	1.99
White, Non-Hispanic	1.6
Asian American and Pacific Islander	.87

Pedestrian fatalities among older adults are only a hint of what's to come

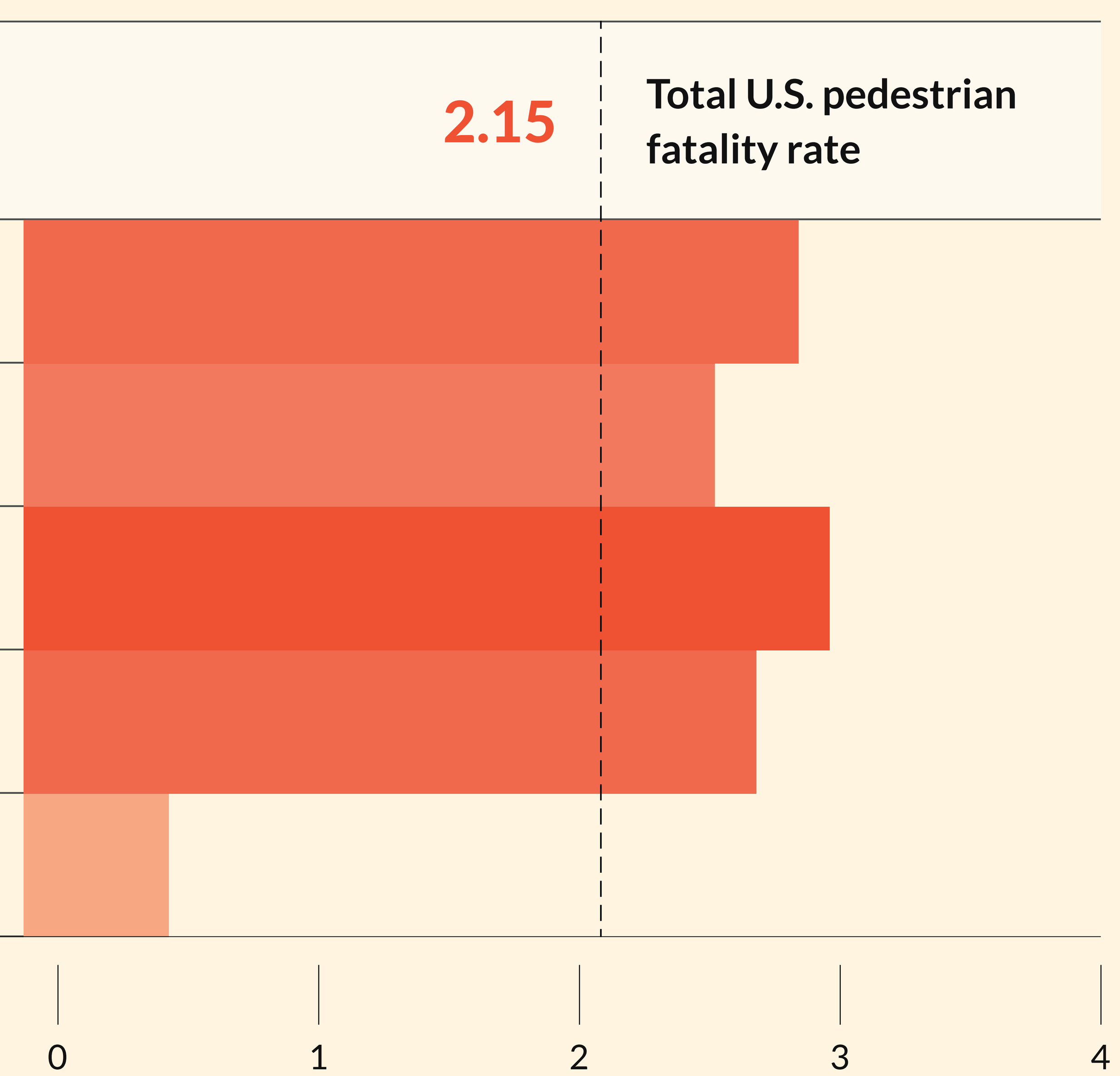
The U.S. is facing an increasingly older population with communities ill-equipped to serve those who are no longer able to drive. People over the age of 65 account for 23 percent of all pedestrian fatalities despite only being 18 percent of the population. This number will continue to grow as we refuse to admit that relying on personal vehicles as the only means of transportation fails everyone, especially older Americans.

Failure to design for speed and visibility makes urban roads increasingly dangerous

Urban areas continue to be the deadliest places for people walking. Between 2015 and 2024, the percentage of pedestrian deaths on urban roadways increased by 6 percent. Roads designed for speed in places filled with homes, businesses, transit stops, and other destinations that create complex activity and encourage frequent use by people walking will continue to produce deadly outcomes until safety becomes the top priority.

Adults between age 50-64 are most likely to be killed

Age	Fatalities per 100,000 people
75+	2.80
65-74	2.56
50-64	2.89
20-49	2.62
0-19	.46



San Antonio, TX

The rest of the developed world is dramatically safer

Photo by Flavius Călin on Unsplash

The United States remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for people walking and is a dramatic outlier amongst the rest of the developed world.

Countries like Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom took the issue of roadway safety seriously with dedicated investment into proven best practices instead of doubling down on decades of lackluster initiatives, waiting for redundant research, and celebrating tiny decreases. As a result, they reduced pedestrian fatalities by 30, 20, and 10 percent, respectively, between 2014 and 2024, while the United States moved in the opposite direction.

During the same period, as other countries made their roads significantly safer, pedestrian fatalities in the U.S. increased by 45 percent, from 4,884 to 7,080.

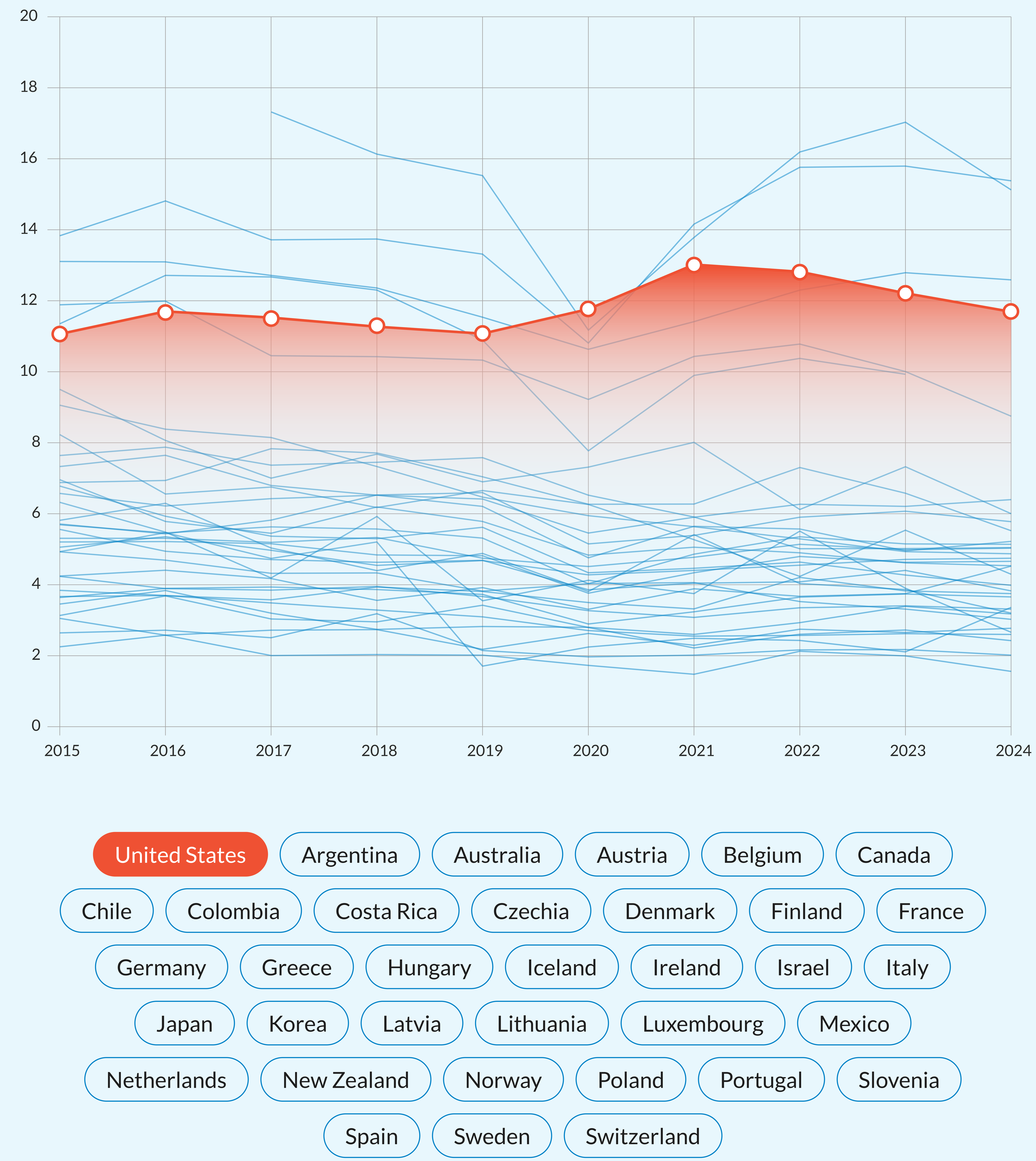
If the U.S. took safety seriously, no agency charged with improving safety would be declaring victory after a one-year decrease of 3.9 percent, down to historic highs. Those with the power to turn the tide seem to be waiting for solutions that are already proven and ready. The nation's pedestrian fatality rate is an indicator of the failure of its transportation system as a whole. This country cannot be distracted from the roadway safety crisis it is still firmly entrenched in.

Setting a new standard for safety and progress

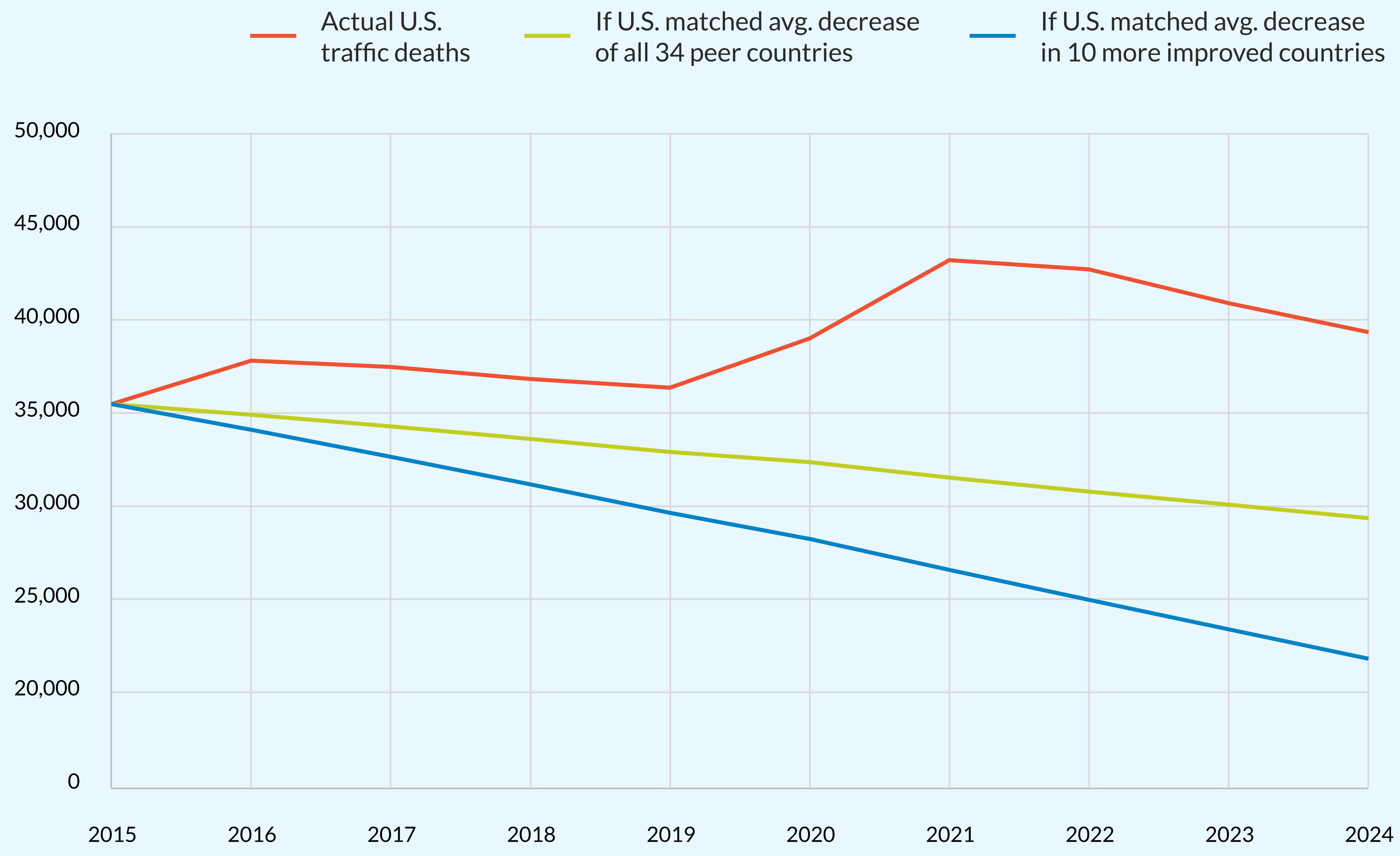
Smart Growth America is calling on policymakers, practitioners, and our own partners to adopt a new standard for roadway safety that puts the U.S. back in line with our global peers. We have calculated that if the U.S. had reduced all traffic fatalities (not just people walking) at a rate similar to that of 34 comparable peer nations (as noted in the chart below), we would be at 8.73 fatalities per 100,000 people vs. our current rate of 11.7.

Reaching 8.73 deaths per 100,000 people should be the new minimum safety standard for what the U.S. considers "success" in improving roadway safety.

U.S. traffic fatality rates vs. 34 peer countries



If U.S. traffic fatality trends had followed other peer nations



Norway, which has the lowest roadway fatality rate in the world, reduced fatalities by 31 percent between 2015 and 2024. That represented 30 fewer deaths. If the U.S. had reduced fatalities by 31 percent over ten years, we would have saved 12,000 lives. That is the kind of reduction that is truly worth celebrating, and one that would get us back in line with the rest of the developed world.

At this point, some will obviously note that it's unrealistic to expect the United States to reach a standard of safety based on the country with the lowest fatality rate. A critic might point out that there are notable differences between the United States and Norway. For example, it's quite a bit smaller, roughly the size of the state of New Mexico and with a population the size of South Carolina. So what about Canada? Our northern neighbors are a more comfortable comparison in terms of size, location, land uses, and some shared culture. After all, the same driver would be able to travel in both Canada and the United States without difficulty. But that driver would be at a much greater risk of being killed in the United States. Canada's roadway fatality rate is 5.03, less than half of that of the United States. Emulating Canada's fatality rate would actually be more of a challenge than an attempt to track with all 34 peer nations identified above.

We cannot be paralyzed by the enormity of this problem, but the United States needs a new benchmark to assess our progress. Until the U.S. reaches a rate of 8.73 fatalities per 100,000 people, there's no reason to celebrate. While zero traffic deaths might be the ultimate goal, simply keeping pace with our global peers should be considered the bare minimum and is entirely attainable.

These peers, representing 34 countries from Asia, Europe, Australia, Central and South America, have been making consistent progress while the United States has inched further and further away from the pack. There's no reason the United States should be such an outlier. Every other country has cellphones. Every other country has alcohol. Every other country has risky, bad behavior. Other countries have weathered the chaos that came with COVID-19. There has been no great, uniquely U.S. crisis that would have crippled the ability to implement proven countermeasures here and achieve the same gains.

If the U.S. had simply been able to emulate the progress of these 34 peer nations in the developed world, 63,441 lives otherwise lost to traffic violence could have been saved over the last decade alone.

*Photo by **Marek Lumi** on Unsplash*

Saving lives on U.S. roads isn't impossible. We've done it before.

The United States has significantly reduced roadway fatalities numerous times before. It's not a coincidence that the years with the largest reductions in overall fatalities coincided with the large-scale adoption of safety technologies, sweeping enforceable policy changes, or global events where Americans drove less.

When safety technologies in vehicles were mandated and universal

Federal law required seat belts in all new vehicles beginning in 1968. Enforcement laws requiring their use followed, with more than half of states adopting seat belt legislation between 1984 and 1987. This combination of policy, enforcement, and industry-wide design changes made the safest choice the only choice.

Federal policies set a limit that states were required to obey

In 1974, Congress set a national speed limit of 55 mph (albeit for fuel concerns, not safety), withholding federal funds from states that refused to comply. Similar actions were taken when the drinking age was raised in the country. Together, these changes helped reduce two of the riskiest behaviors on U.S. roads. It also helped reshape what was considered acceptable driver behavior.

Americans incorporated more walking, biking, and transit into their everyday lives

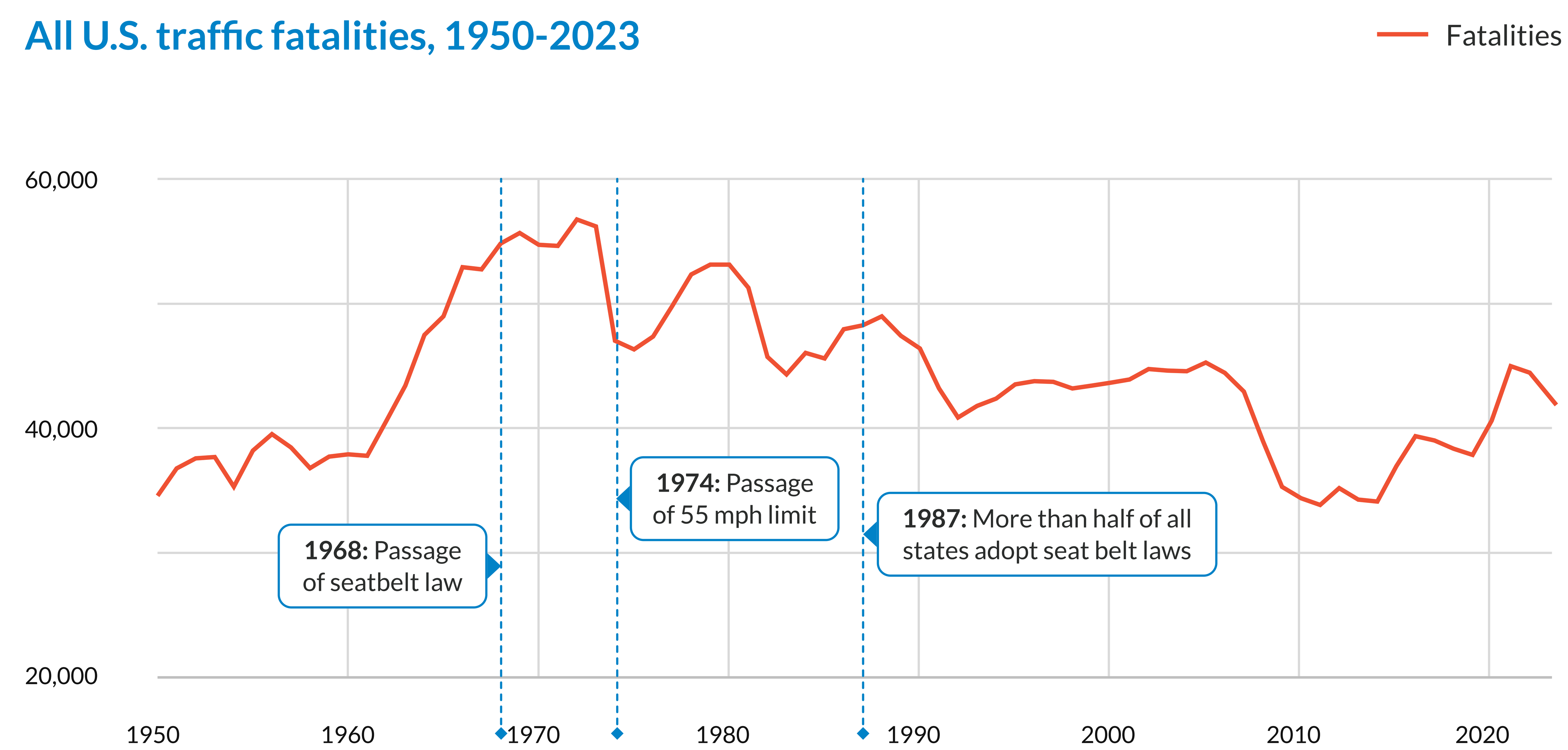
Major global events have also reshaped roadway safety. During the oil crisis in the late 1970s, gas prices skyrocketed, and people considered ways to incorporate walking, biking, or taking the bus into their daily routines. Where the built environment supports it, more people walking or rolling creates safer streets for all roadway users and encourages more use of those modes.

What these moments have in common is decisive action paired with universal adoption. They did not rely on individual behavior alone for their success. Instead, they were implemented so widely that they changed the underlying assumptions about transportation itself, making safer behavior the default.

Proven street design interventions have not received the same level of support, despite consistently demonstrating that they work just as well. Instead, lifesaving countermeasures continue to be debated and politicized, failing to be widely used years after their effectiveness has been established.

We did manage to cut pedestrian fatalities nearly in half from 1979 to 2009, when they began the current dramatic increase back to the historic levels of nearly 50 years ago. Reductions can happen when policymakers and practitioners move beyond plans and promises and start implementing proven safety measures that we know will actually work—even when doing so is hard. This means the universal adoption and implementation of street design changes that slow down cars, improve visibility, and create safe travel for everyone using the street. This means creating a federal transportation system that not only incentivizes these changes, but holds accountable those who would disregard them. And it means changing how the United States measures whether or not its transportation system is working to meet the needs of the day-to-day users.

All U.S. traffic fatalities, 1950-2023



Garden City, ID

Other countries took decisive action. The U.S. made plans and crossed its fingers

Other countries have reduced speeds, invested in active transportation, and incentivized transit use. They've installed miles of protected bike lane networks and created vibrant pedestrian plazas, clearly communicating that people walking and biking are to be prioritized and celebrated. The U.S. has put the onus of safety on the people most likely to be killed, using opportunities like National Bike Month and National Pedestrian Safety Month to remind individuals to use helmets and wear reflective gear.

There have been moments where we could have charted a different path. For example, the historic investment made in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) could have drastically changed streets across the country, redefining what a successful transportation system means in the twenty-first century. Instead, safety was once again siloed as the specific purpose of small programs, rather than the top priority of the entire program, and Congress doubled down on the same overall approach that has produced some of the worst roadway fatality rates in the developed world.

Look at the IIJA's standout safety initiatives: Safe Streets and Roads for All (a grant program so small that it barely shows up on the pie chart of the overall federal transportation program), the National Roadway Safety Strategy (an unfunded initiative that lacked cohesive direction and relied heavily on commitments of external partners), and the adoption of the Safe System approach (a worthy goal, but policymakers seem to stumble on what it means past a catchy tagline). It is difficult to evaluate the U.S. Department of Transportation's understanding of the Safe System approach and its usefulness when the department's own dashboard tracking progress doesn't seem to exist.

Catching up will require an investment that recognizes how far we're behind

Improved street designs need to be implemented as universally as vehicle safety standards were. Auto manufacturers are not allowed to forego airbags because of cost, aesthetics, or inconvenience. Street design changes that have been repeatedly proven to save lives similarly can't be counted as optional for transportation engineers and other practitioners.

Instead, safety countermeasures are endlessly debated by policymakers, practitioners, and too much deference is given to community members who lack the technical expertise to back up their opinions. How many cities have experiences like this one from Washington, D.C. where a long-developed project to install a bike lane and make a street safer was blocked because, as the head of the D.C. Department of Transportation put it, "There's very few people that are a fan of how those [flexposts] look aesthetically."

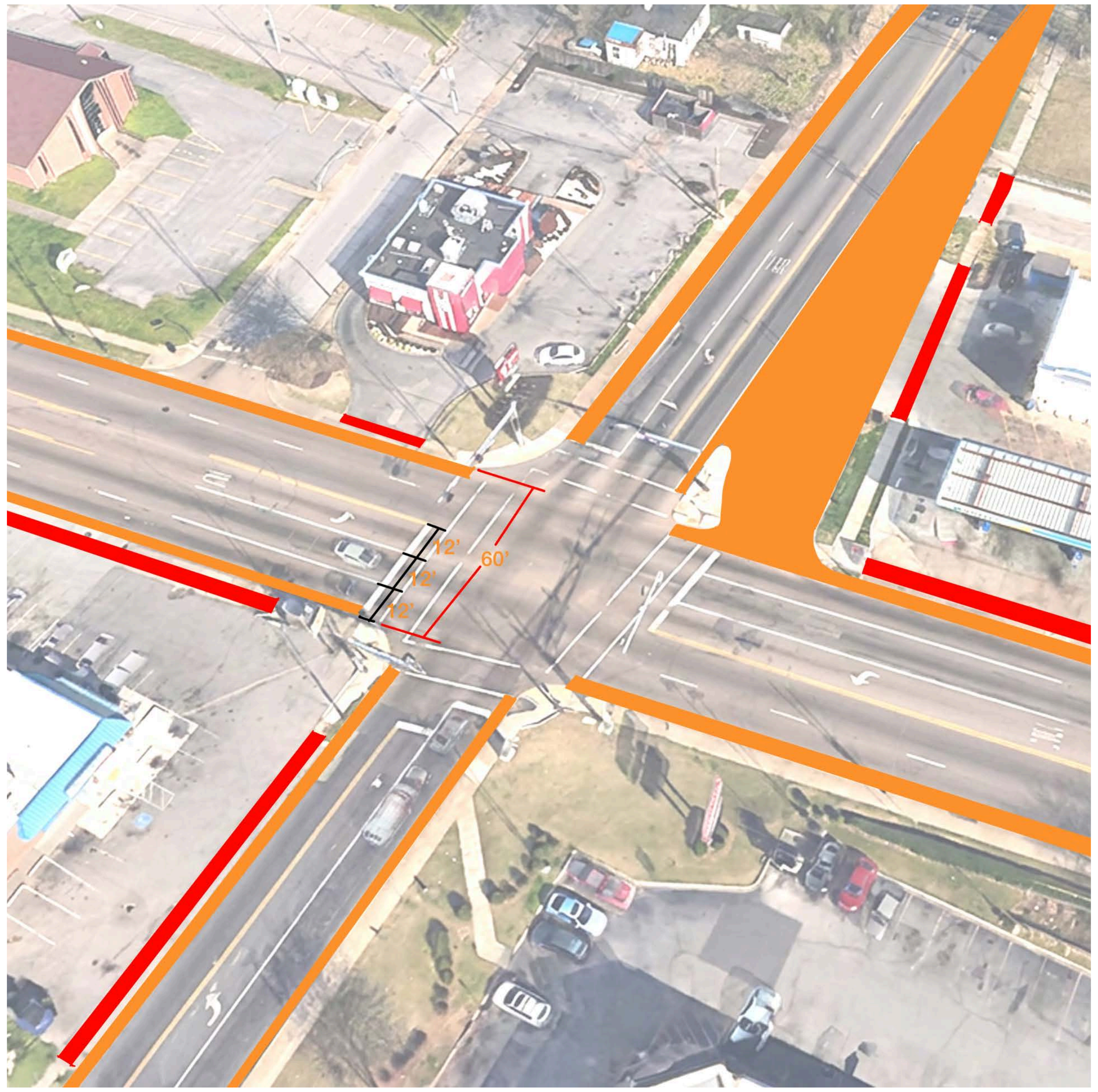
Too often, decisions are made to not tackle an urgently needed street redesign because of fears of community pushback, a belief that the facilities won't be heavily used, or a misconception that the street is already working as it is. Equally frustrating are the projects that are installed and then ripped out before they can fully demonstrate the impact they can have because they lost a contest in the court of public opinion. The state of Florida removed a painted crosswalk it had previously installed in Orlando that not only commemorated victims from the Pulse nightclub shooting in 2016 but also improved pedestrian safety and adhered to federal guidelines. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis commented that, "We will not allow our state roads to be commandeered for political purposes." That may be, but one would hope that road improvements that have consistently been shown to improve safety would transcend politics.

What dangerous design looks like—and how to make it safer

Addressing the roadway safety crisis will require making street design changes to reduce speeds, improve visibility, and create protected space for people walking and biking. Fortunately, we already know how to do this. The images below illustrate how a dangerous intersection in Memphis, TN—the deadliest metro area for pedestrians in the United States—could be redesigned to improve safety.

Existing conditions

The intersection of Jackson Avenue and Hollywood Street in Memphis, TN, has experienced multiple pedestrian fatalities. Wide lanes, frequent driveways, and long crossing distances create challenges for people walking.



Opportunity for change

The orange and red areas highlight space that could be reallocated to improve safety, visibility, and comfort without impeding traffic flow.

A safer design

The redesigned intersection includes improved crosswalks, shorter driveways, expanded pedestrian space, and street trees. Together, these changes create a safer and more comfortable environment for people walking and biking.

Saving lives should not be controversial

Little Rock, AR

If the United States ever wishes to rejoin its global peers on long-term reductions in traffic fatalities, there needs to be a wholehearted embrace of today's engineering best practices by policymakers and practitioners alike. This means regularly updating the MUTCD to reflect the latest design guidance, allowing for use of quick-build demonstrations to address the most urgent safety needs, and being willing to consider that the infrastructure designed decades ago is not meeting the needs of communities today.

The U.S. did not become a dangerous outlier by accident or due to unavoidable cultural differences. It happened because the United States failed to put real resources and intention behind implementing what is known to save lives.

We need action. That means design standards that reflect best practices, funding, and resources to actually get projects using those standards into the ground, and measures to hold those who don't comply accountable. Real progress will only come when proven countermeasures in street design are implemented across all levels of government and jurisdictions, with consequences for those who continue to ignore them and incentives for those who lead.

The country cannot afford to stay complacent while thousands of people will continue to die tomorrow on roads we know how to make safer today.

Rank	Metro Area	Avg. annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100k people (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2015-2019)	Long term trend in fatality rate
1	Memphis, TN-MS-AR	5.5	369	221	2.2 ▲
2	Albuquerque, NM	5.32	245	176	1.46 ▲
3	Bakersfield-Delano, CA	5.01	229	153	1.56 ▲
4	Tucson, AZ	4.43	235	142	1.67 ▲
5	Baton Rouge, LA	4.18	183	115	1.49 ▲
6	Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway, AR	4.17	158	79	2.03 ▲
7	Fresno, CA	4.06	239	137	1.28 ▲
8	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	3.74	618	557	0.14 ▲
T-9	New Orleans-Metairie, LA	3.73	183	145	1.44 ▲
T-9	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	3.73	871	680	0.75 ▲
11	Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, FL	3.7	117	98	0.35 ▲
12	Charleston-North Charleston, SC	3.69	154	125	0.46 ▲
13	Jackson, MS	3.66	112	74	1.18 ▲
14	Deltona-Daytona Beach-Ormond Beach, FL	3.6	127	126	-0.3 ▼
15	North Port-Bradenton-Sarasota, FL	3.44	153	119	0.48 ▲
16	Jacksonville, FL	3.41	287	262	-0.08 ▼
17	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	3.4	1062	945	0.3 ▲
18	Columbia, SC	3.32	141	119	0.43 ▲
T-19	Sacramento-Roseville-Folsom, CA	3.21	389	284	0.76 ▲
T-19	Stockton-Lodi, CA	3.21	128	128	-0.24 ▼
21	Lakeland-Winter Haven, FL	3.14	124	89	0.55 ▲
22	Phoenix-Mesa-Chandler, AZ	3.11	782	660	0.34 ▲
23	Las Vegas-Henderson-North Las Vegas, NV	3.1	361	287	0.47 ▲
24	San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX	3.06	408	328	0.4 ▲
25	Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL	3	419	433	-0.45 ▼
26	Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC	2.97	143	124	0.2 ▲

Rank	Metro Area	Avg. annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100k people (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2015-2019)	Long term trend in fatality rate
27	Cape Coral-Fort Myers, FL	2.96	121	97	0.33 ▲
28	Greensboro-High Point, NC	2.95	116	80	0.85 ▲
29	Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN	2.9	199	145	0.59 ▲
T-30	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	2.83	1834	1583	0.44 ▲
T-30	San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad, CA	2.83	465	402	0.41 ▲
32	Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	2.8	875	716	0.36 ▲
33	Augusta-Richmond County, GA-SC	2.72	85	56	0.85 ▲
34	Houston-Pasadena-The Woodlands, TX	2.65	986	752	0.47 ▲
T-35	Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX	2.59	314	231	0.41 ▲
T-35	New Haven, CT	2.59	74	82	0.68 ▲
37	Nashville-Davidson--Murfreesboro--Franklin, TN	2.48	258	168	0.69 ▲
T-38	Oklahoma City, OK	2.47	181	144	0.39 ▲
T-38	St. Louis, MO-IL	2.47	347	250	0.69 ▲
40	Tulsa, OK	2.39	124	104	0.29 ▲
41	Baltimore-Columbia-Towson, MD	2.37	338	286	0.32 ▲
42	El Paso, TX	2.33	102	124	-0.62 ▼
43	Spokane-Spokane Valley, WA	2.31	69	35	1.04 ▲
44	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	2.27	907	718	0.31 ▲
45	Birmingham, AL	2.21	131	115	0.09 ▲
46	Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	2.18	683	593	0.23 ▲
47	Indianapolis-Carmel-Greenwood, IN	2.17	231	170	0.49 ▲
48	Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA	2.15	271	209	0.44 ▲
49	Chattanooga, TN-GA	2.08	60	44	0.5 ▲
50	Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC	2.07	287	241	0.18 ▲
T-51	Denver-Aurora-Centennial, CO	2.06	310	233	0.45 ▲
T-51	Richmond, VA	2.06	138	124	0.11 ▲

Rank	Metro Area	Avg. annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100k people (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2015-2019)	Long term trend in fatality rate
53	Wichita, KS	1.99	65	39	0.77 ▲
54	Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	1.95	426	411	0.05 ▲
55	San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	1.94	191	189	0.04 ▲
56	Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	1.92	389	252	0.62 ▲
T-57	Scranton--Wilkes-Barre, PA	1.86	53	41	0.38 ▲
T-57	Winston-Salem, NC	1.86	64	55	0.21 ▲
59	Durham-Chapel Hill, NC	1.83	55	49	0.27 ▲
60	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX	1.82	81	68	0.23 ▲
61	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	1.8	569	426	0.43 ▲
62	Knoxville, TN	1.78	83	63	0.3 ▲
63	Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, AR	1.77	51	33	0.49 ▲
64	Raleigh-Cary, NC	1.76	131	103	0.21 ▲
65	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	1.73	401	391	0.07 ▲
66	Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, CT	1.67	96	81	0.33 ▲
67	Kansas City, MO-KS	1.66	184	150	0.25 ▲
68	Urban Honolulu, HI	1.62	81	96	-0.33 ▼
T-69	Colorado Springs, CO	1.61	62	48	0.28 ▲
T-69	Salt Lake City-Murray, UT	1.61	103	102	-0.09 ▼
71	Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN	1.6	752	638	0.26 ▲
72	Virginia Beach-Chesapeake-Norfolk, VA-NC	1.59	142	126	0.16 ▲
73	Columbus, OH	1.58	172	138	0.25 ▲
T-74	Dayton-Kettering-Beavercreek, OH	1.57	64	54	0.23 ▲
T-74	Rochester, NY	1.57	83	61	0.43 ▲
76	New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ	1.52	1509	1546	-0.08 ▼
T-77	Milwaukee-Waukesha, WI	1.5	118	109	0.12 ▲
T-77	Oxnard-Thousand Oaks-Ventura, CA	1.5	63	53	0.25 ▲

Rank	Metro Area	Avg. annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100k people (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2015-2019)	Long term trend in fatality rate
79	Albany-Schenectady-Troy, NY	1.46	66	61	0.07 ▲
80	Grand Rapids-Wyoming-Kentwood, MI	1.39	81	64	0.19 ▲
81	Syracuse, NY	1.37	45	54	-0.29 ▼
82	Kiryas Joel-Poughkeepsie-Newburgh, NY	1.33	47	34	0.32 ▲
83	Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN	1.31	149	126	0.17 ▲
84	Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY	1.26	73	58	0.23 ▲
T-85	Akron, OH	1.23	43	36	0.21 ▲
T-85	Toledo, OH	1.23	37	45	-0.17 ▼
87	Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ	1.21	53	42	0.21 ▲
88	Bridgeport-Stamford-Danbury, CT	1.19	57	71	-0.31 ▼
89	Cleveland, OH	1.12	122	104	0.11 ▲
90	Harrisburg-Carlisle, PA	1.09	33	49	-0.63 ▼
91	Boise City, ID	1.08	44	36	0.07 ▲
92	Providence-Warwick, RI-MA	1.06	89	92	-0.08 ▼
93	Omaha, NE-IA	1.02	50	50	-0.05 ▼
94	Ogden, UT	1.01	33	39	-0.17 ▼
95	Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA	0.98	36	26	0.22 ▲
96	Pittsburgh, PA	0.93	113	115	-0.06 ▼
97	Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	0.92	228	234	-0.05 ▼
98	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	0.89	165	144	0.08 ▲
99	Worcester, MA	0.88	38	55	-0.29 ▼
100	Madison, WI	0.87	30	25	0.11 ▲
101	Provo-Orem-Lehi, UT	0.7	25	20	0.05 ▲

Rank	State	Avg. annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100k people (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2020-2024)	Pedestrian deaths (2015-2019)	Long term trend in fatality rate
1	New Mexico	4.42	469	369	0.89 ▲
2	Louisiana	3.53	813	630	0.83 ▲
3	Arizona	3.49	1288	1000	0.65 ▲
4	South Carolina	3.37	893	750	0.38 ▲
5	Florida	3.32	3726	3356	0.11 ▲
6	Mississippi	3.18	469	346	0.86 ▲
7	Nevada	2.88	458	378	0.34 ▲
8	California	2.82	5546	4681	0.44 ▲
9	Georgia	2.79	1527	1177	0.53 ▲
10	Delaware	2.74	140	151	-0.41 ▼
T-11	Tennessee	2.56	903	606	0.75 ▲
T-11	Texas	2.56	3865	3097	0.37 ▲
13	Arkansas	2.51	382	264	0.75 ▲
14	Alabama	2.34	594	563	0.03 ▲
15	North Carolina	2.3	1234	1025	0.3 ▲
16	Maryland	2.27	703	577	0.35 ▲
T-17	Oklahoma	2.24	452	382	0.3 ▲
T-17	Oregon	2.24	477	369	0.45 ▲
19	Kentucky	2.09	475	377	0.4 ▲
20	Missouri	2.06	637	500	0.42 ▲
21	New Jersey	2.02	943	863	0.08 ▲
22	Alaska	1.9	70	58	0.33 ▲
23	Hawaii	1.81	131	146	-0.24 ▼
24	Colorado	1.79	524	392	0.39 ▲
25	Washington	1.73	676	472	0.46 ▲
26	Michigan	1.67	841	768	0.13 ▲
27	Connecticut	1.6	290	267	0.11 ▲
28	Illinois	1.55	987	783	0.32 ▲
T-29	Indiana	1.51	518	471	0.1 ▲
T-29	Virginia	1.51	659	551	0.21 ▲
31	Montana	1.49	83	70	0.16 ▲
32	New York	1.41	1403	1406	-0.03 ▼
33	South Dakota	1.39	63	39	0.49 ▲
34	Wyoming	1.34	39	32	0.24 ▲
35	Pennsylvania	1.32	856	812	0.05 ▲
36	Kansas	1.31	193	142	0.33 ▲
37	West Virginia	1.29	115	122	-0.05 ▼
38	Ohio	1.28	754	643	0.18 ▲
39	Utah	1.19	201	198	-0.09 ▼
40	Maine	1.17	81	78	0
41	Massachusetts	1.03	363	383	-0.09 ▼
42	Vermont	1.02	33	26	0.19 ▲
43	Rhode Island	1	55	58	-0.1 ▼
T-44	Idaho	0.99	96	69	0.19 ▲
T-44	North Dakota	0.99	39	30	0.2 ▲
46	Wisconsin	0.97	287	279	0.01 ▲
47	New Hampshire	0.93	65	55	0.11 ▲
48	Nebraska	0.89	88	95	-0.1 ▼
T-49	Iowa	0.83	134	113	0.11 ▲
T-49	Minnesota	0.83	237	224	0.02 ▲

Smart Growth America

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