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New Report Finds Older Connecticut Pedestrians at Risk

Analysis shows people aged 60 years and older suffer disproportionately high pedestrian fatality rates

Older pedestrians are far more likely to be killed while walking than those under 60, according to a new study by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign.

From 2008 through 2010, 44 pedestrians aged 60 years and older were killed on Connecticut roads. Though comprising a little over 19 percent of the state's population, this age group accounted for over 36 percent of the total pedestrian fatalities during the three-year period. Those aged 75 years and older represent almost 7 percent of Connecticut's population, but nearly 15 percent of pedestrian deaths.

Since the Tri-State Transportation Campaign's previous senior pedestrian fatality report (which looked at pedestrian fatalities from 2007 through 2009), the pedestrian fatality rate increased for pedestrians aged 60 years and older. The fatality rate for pedestrians aged 75 years and older decreased since the Campaign's last report.

Both the Campaign and AARP Connecticut expressed concern over the increased fatality rate for pedestrians aged 60 and older.

"As our population ages, it is critical that we address this growing problem to make our roadways safer for older residents and all users. AARP strongly supports roadway safety improvements which will save lives and further enhance the livability of our communities," Jennifer Millea, associate state director of communications for AARP Connecticut, stated.

Nationwide, the pedestrian fatality rate for older Americans is more than 1.5 times that for those under 60 years. But the disparities in Connecticut are even greater. The

pedestrian fatality rate for Connecticut residents over 60 years is 2.41 times that of those younger than 60 years. People 75 years and older suffer a fatality rate that is 2.76 times that of their younger neighbors.

Tri-State's research showed that Litchfield County had the highest average older pedestrian fatality rate of any county in Connecticut, and had the highest of any Tri-State county overall. Among pedestrian fatalities in Litchfield County from 2008 through 2010, 75 percent were over age 60.

The Campaign also examined fatalities along U.S. 1 and U.S. 5, two roads that consistently top the list in its annual analysis of the state's most dangerous roads for pedestrians. The Campaign found that from 2005 through 2010, older pedestrians comprised 75 percent of the pedestrian fatalities along U.S. 1 in Fairfield County.

The Campaign applauded the Connecticut Department of Transportation's (ConnDOT) July 2012 announcement of a "road diet" on a section of Burnside Avenue/Route 44 in East Hartford. The road diet will improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists by narrowing a portion of the roadway from 2 lanes in each direction to 1 lane with a bike lane in each direction. Three cyclists have been killed on Burnside Avenue since May 2010, and according to the Campaign's 2012 *Most Dangerous Roads* report, there were more pedestrian fatalities in Hartford County than in any other Connecticut county besides New Haven from 2008 through 2010.

"We are thrilled that ConnDOT is taking this step to increase pedestrian and cyclist safety in East Hartford," said Steven Higashide, the Campaign's Senior Planner and Connecticut Coordinator. "ConnDOT can further ensure the safety of older pedestrians across Connecticut by creating and funding programs that specifically address the needs of older pedestrians and other vulnerable populations, such as the young and the handicapped."

The Campaign recommended that ConnDOT develop and fund Safe Routes for Seniors and Safe Routes to Transit programs as well as ensure that safety funds are spent on pedestrian safety projects, especially for areas around transit. To pay for pedestrian and bicyclist safety projects, the state should commit to using the full allotment of its federal Transportation Alternatives funds. The Campaign also recommended that the state legislature pass a vulnerable users bill that would stiffen penalties for drivers that recklessly kill or injure pedestrians, bicyclists, highway workers, or state troopers.

Tri-State noted that New Haven had passed a Complete Streets policy, and that Bridgeport's BGreen2020 plan also embraced the design philosophy. Complete Streets policies strive to make sure that streets are designed or improved with the needs of all users – pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and drivers – in mind.

Tri-State staff analyst Renata Silberblatt conducted the Campaign's analysis using data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatality Analysis Reporting

System (FARS) and the U.S. Bureau of the Census to examine fatality rates by age and gender for each county in New Jersey, downstate New York and Connecticut.

The full report, as well as county fact sheets and maps showing the locations of pedestrian fatalities throughout the region can be found at www.tstc.org.

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The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly and equitable transportation system in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey.