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New Report Finds Older Downstate New York Pedestrians at Risk

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

Downstate New York pedestrians 60 years and older are disproportionately at risk of being killed in collisions with vehicles while walking, according to a new study by Tri-State Transportation Campaign.

From 2003 through 2012, 916 pedestrians aged 60 years and older were killed on downstate New York roads, according to Tri-State's report, *Older Pedestrians at Risk: A Ten Year Survey and Look Ahead*. Though comprising only 17.5 percent of the downstate population, this age group accounted for 38 percent of the pedestrian fatalities during the 10-year period. Those aged 75 years and older represent 6 percent of downstate New York's population, but 18 percent of pedestrian deaths. The pedestrian fatality rate for downstate New York residents 60 and older is three times higher than that of residents under 60. For residents 75 and older, the pedestrian fatality rate is more than four times that of those under 60.

"In 10 years, the share of downstate New York residents 60 and older increased from 16.6 percent of the population to 18.8 percent— 2.2 percentage points," said Renata Silberblatt, Tri-State Transportation Campaign's senior analyst. "As our population ages, it is imperative for municipalities and state officials to design communities with the needs of active older residents in mind."

According to AARP, decreased bone density exacerbates injuries sustained by seniors. Coupled with mobility issues that hinder their ability to cross a road quickly, this age group is particularly prone to critical injuries from car collisions.

"Despite older pedestrians' increased risk of being killed while walking, simple roadway improvements — clearly marked crosswalks, longer crossing signals and wider pedestrian islands — make walking safer and easier for older residents and younger residents alike," noted Veronica Vanterpool, executive director, Tri-State Transportation Campaign.

Tri-State's research showed that Manhattan had the highest average older pedestrian fatality rate of any county in downstate New York as well as the highest of the 41 counties in the tri-state region (Connecticut, New Jersey and downstate New York counties). Over 42.5 percent of Manhattan's 364 pedestrian fatalities were pedestrians 60 or older. The chart below ranks all the 12 downstate New York counties by older pedestrian fatality rates:

Rank	County	Avg. Older Pedestrian Fatality Rate per 100,000* (2003-2012)	Avg. Younger (under 60 years) Pedestrian Fatality Rate per 100,000* (2003-2012)	Older (60+ years) Pedestrian Fatalities, 2003-2012
1	Manhattan	5.46	1.49	155
2	Nassau County	5.17	1.49	142
3	Brooklyn	4.94	1.23	202
4	Bronx County	3.94	1.16	79
5	Queens County	3.75	1.11	152
6	Staten Island	3.57	1.18	29
7	Putnam County	3.46	1.33	6
8	Suffolk County	2.99	2.23	81
9	Rockland County	2.38	1.14	13
10	Orange County	2.21	1.10	12
11	Westchester County	1.98	0.68	36
12	Dutchess County	1.77	0.54	9
n/a	Downstate New York	4.00	1.31	916

**Fatality rates are calculated according to the population of the relevant age group (i.e., population aged 60 years and older, population under 60 years).*

“Older New Yorkers worry about safety when they walk in their neighborhoods and communities, and for good reason, as Tri-State’s report shows,” said Beth Finkel, state director for AARP in New York. “AARP’s research consistently finds that pedestrian safety is a major concern for New Yorkers fifty and over. We’re hopeful that by illustrating just how vulnerable older New Yorkers are, this report will spur our government leaders to prioritize safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure as part of full follow-through on the Safe Streets law Governor Cuomo signed in 2012,” added Finkel.

Tri-State recommends that:

- NYSDOT should expand the SafeSeniors Program statewide, modeled on the successful pilot program on Long Island and create a Safe Routes to Transit Program that implements pedestrian safety improvements in areas near transit stops.
- The state legislature should grant communities across the state the authority to lower their statutory speed limit to 25 miles per hour in residential and business districts, an authority recently granted to New York City.
- NYSDOT’s upcoming five-year capital plan should set a goal of investing five percent of the total transportation dollars on infrastructure that increases safety for those who bike and walk.
- NYSDOT should develop and implement performance measures to better track funds going towards bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and to track its own progress in implementing the state’s 2012 complete streets law.

- Counties outside of New York City should adopt a Vision Zero policy similar to New York City's aimed at eliminating traffic fatalities and making streets safer for all users.
- NYSDOT should adopt the National Association of City Transportation Officials' (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guidelines. The guidelines provide technical standards that departments of transportation can use to create streets that safely accommodate all road users, including pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders. The Federal Highway Administration, thirty-seven cities, including New York City, and six states have adopted NACTO standards.
- Communities across the state should pursue transit oriented development (TOD), which ensures that housing, shops and offices are in proximity to existing bus and rail routes.

Tri-State Senior Analyst Renata Silberblatt conducted the Campaign's analysis using data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) Encyclopedia and the U.S. Census Bureau 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.