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New Report Finds Older New Jersey Pedestrians at Risk

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

New Jersey 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 2009 through 2011, 137 pedestrians aged 60 years and older were killed on New Jersey roads, Tri-State's annual report, "Older Pedestrians at Risk And How States Can Make it Safer and Easier for Older Residents to Walk," found. Though comprising 19 percent of the state's population, people aged 60 and older accounted for 31.1 percent of the total pedestrian fatalities during the three-year period. Those aged 75 years and older represent just 6.5 percent of New Jersey's population, but 13 percent of pedestrian deaths. The pedestrian fatality rate for New Jersey residents 60 and older is 1.93 times higher than that of residents under 60. For residents 75 and older, the pedestrian fatality rate is 2.34 times that of those under 60.

Unfortunately, since last year's Older Pedestrians at Risk report, pedestrian fatality rates unfortunately increased slightly for New Jersey pedestrians aged 60 years and older as well as for pedestrians 75 years and older.

"It is shocking to consider that older pedestrians are killed in our region at a rate of nearly three per week. Elected officials at all levels of government should regard this as an urgent call to action," said Jim Dieterle, state director of AARP New Jersey.

"As our population ages, it is increasingly important that New Jersey take measures to make streets safer for older residents," said Janna Chernetz, New Jersey advocate for the

Campaign. “Many improvements that make streets less dangerous for older pedestrians, such as curb ramps, well-marked crosswalks and pedestrian countdown clocks, help all pedestrians, from parents with children to teenagers,” she added.

“Many fatal and debilitating pedestrian crashes occur on South Jersey’s arterial roads such as Route 130 and the Black Horse Pike. Over the past 60 years these roads have evolved into pseudo-expressways while becoming centers for retail and commercial development,” said John Boyle, research director at the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia. “Making these roads safer for people to walk or bike along and across requires critical thinking and the political will to make hard choices. But if done right the results are better and safer roads for everyone along with the opportunity to transform bland commercial strips into attractive places where people want to be,” he noted.

Tri-State’s research showed that Hudson County had the highest average older pedestrian fatality rate of any county in New Jersey and the second highest of the 41 counties in the tri-state region (Connecticut, New Jersey and downstate New York counties). Almost 38 percent of Hudson County’s 37 pedestrian fatalities were 60 years or older. The chart below ranks New Jersey counties by older pedestrian fatality rates. (Counties with no older pedestrian fatalities are not included.)

Rank	County **	Older (60+ yrs) Pedestrian Fatalities (2009-2011)	Avg. Older Pedestrian Fatality Rate per 100,000 * (2009-2011)	Avg. <60 yrs Pedestrian Fatality Rate per 100,000 * (2009-2011)
1	Hudson County, NJ	14	4.98	1.45
2	Passaic County, NJ	12	4.64	0.97
3	Essex County, NJ	16	4.14	2.05
4	Bergen County, NJ	22	3.87	0.89
5	Union County, NJ	9	3.15	1.83
6	Mercer County, NJ	6	3.06	1.44
7	Atlantic County, NJ	5	3.02	3.36
8	Middlesex County, NJ	12	2.84	1.46
9	Camden County, NJ	8	2.83	1.82
10	Ocean County, NJ	12	2.53	2.07
11	Burlington County, NJ	6	2.26	1.02
12	Monmouth County, NJ	7	1.87	1.24
13	Warren County, NJ	1	1.60	0.76
14	Hunterdon County, NJ	1	1.30	1.26
14	Gloucester County, NJ	2	1.30	1.12
16	Morris County, NJ	3	1.06	0.84
17	Somerset County, NJ	1	0.58	0.62
n/a	New Jersey	137	2.73	1.42

**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).*

*** Counties with no older pedestrian fatalities are not included in the chart.*

Tri-State praised the New Jersey Department of Transportation's (NJDOT) Safe Streets to Transit Program which awarded Delran Township \$250,000 in 2013 to build sidewalks on New Jersey's Route 130, where there currently are none. Tri-State also praised the Attorney General's office, the Division of Highway Traffic Safety and the 12 Burlington County municipal and county agencies that have established Operation Safe Passage, which aims to make Route 130 less deadly for pedestrians through enforcement measures. Tri-State noted that in addition to NJDOT's Complete Streets policy, five New Jersey counties and 59 municipalities have adopted Complete Streets policies.

"Complete Streets policies ensure that roads are designed to meet the needs of all users – motorists, pedestrians, cyclists and transit users alike," Matthew Norris, Tri-State Transportation Campaign's South Jersey advocate said. "To protect residents, counties and municipalities should continue to adopt Complete Streets policies. And, once adopted, counties and municipalities need to move forward with implementation plans."

Despite the existing efforts by NJDOT, the recent rise in older pedestrian fatalities highlights the need to do more.

Moving forward, the Campaign recommended that:

- NJDOT continue to incentivize municipal and county-level adoption of Complete Streets policies and municipalities and counties that have passed these policies should receive priority funding from NJDOT;
- The Legislature pass a Vulnerable Users bill that would stiffen penalties for drivers who kill or injure pedestrians, bicyclists, highway workers, or other non-motorists using the roadway;
- The Legislature enact a Safe Passing bill that clearly indicates how motorists should act when passing a vulnerable user on the roadway; and
- New Jersey and the State's metropolitan planning organizations allocate funding to regional trails such as The Circuit in Southern New Jersey and prioritize pedestrian and bicycle improvements on roads that provide access to these trails.

Tri-State Transportation Campaign 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 tstc.org.

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.