

## **BMTS Article Digest March – April 2025**

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

The following is a compilation of articles that may be of interest to BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee members. This and past digests can also be accessed from the Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee page at <http://bmtsonline.com/about/committees>.



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### [Transportation](#)

## Pedestrian Deaths Decline, but Remain at Record Highs

Pedestrian deaths dipped slightly in the first half of 2024. California's 13 percent reduction in deaths accounted for most of the net decline around the country.

March 11, 2025 • Jared Brey



Mourners left a memorial at an Emmaus street corner for Abbie Zukowski in 2015. The 11-year-old girl died after being hit by a car at the corner of Sixth and Chestnut streets. Both Lehigh County prosecutors and a civil jury determined the driver was not at fault for the crash. (FILE PHOTO THE MORNING CALL/TNS)

#### In Brief:

- There were 88 fewer pedestrian deaths in the first half of 2024 than the first half of 2023, according to a new report.
- A reduction in deaths in California accounted for most of the drop.
- Pedestrian deaths hit a low point in 2009, then surged during the pandemic.

Pedestrian deaths on U.S. roads declined for a second straight year, but remain 48 percent higher than a decade ago, according to a new [analysis](#) from the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA).

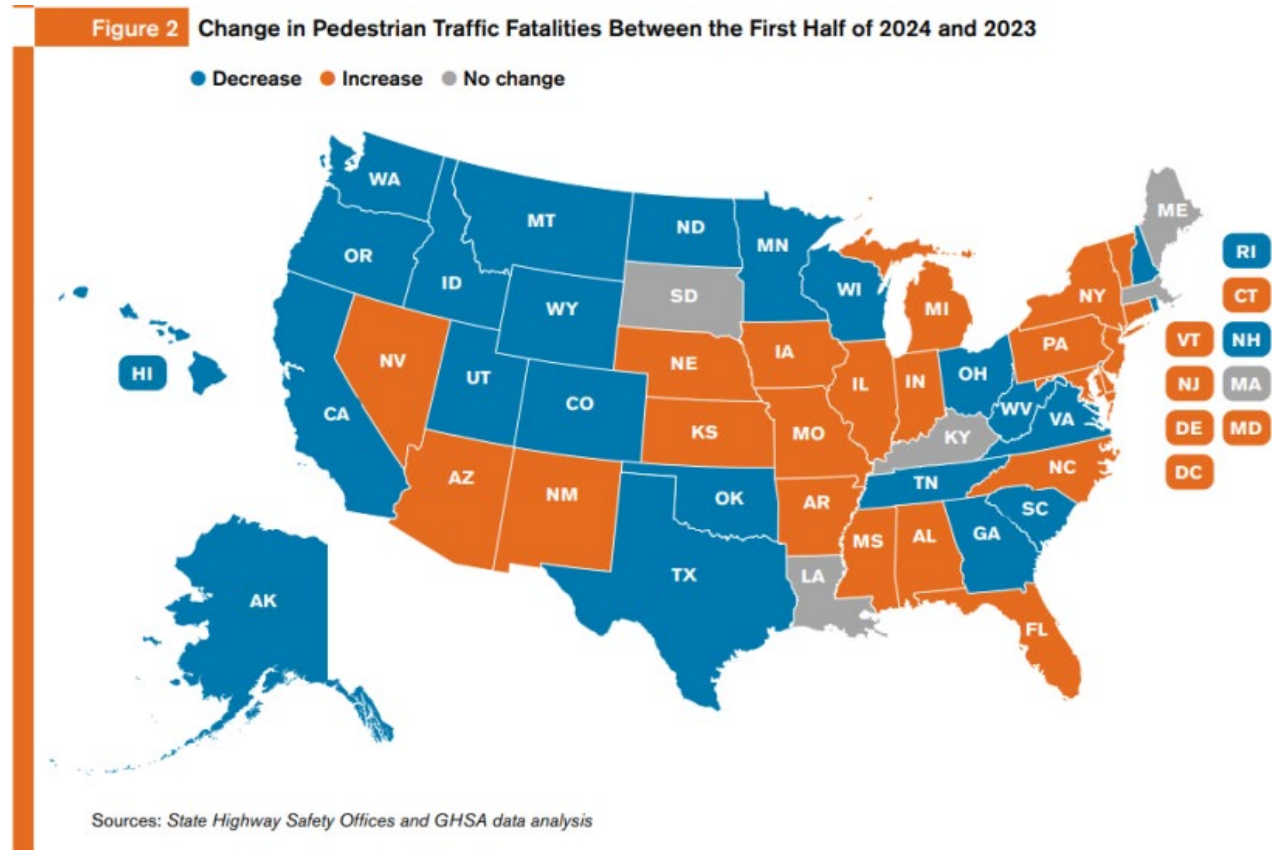
In the first half of 2024, there were 3,304 pedestrians killed by drivers, according to the report. That's down from 3,392 in the first half of 2023 and 3,526 in the first half of 2022, the year with the most pedestrian deaths in four decades. The GHSA publishes the data twice a year, based on surveys of [State Highway Safety offices](#).

"We really try to stay on top of this and call attention to it because we're very committed to pedestrian safety and making sure the public understands the magnitude of this problem," says Pam Shadel Fischer, a spokesperson for the GHSA.

Pedestrian deaths in the U.S. were at their [lowest](#) in 2009, but crept back up through the 2010s before surging during the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers have identified a variety of factors that help explain that surge. A reduction in traffic during the pandemic-related shutdowns created more opportunities for people to speed on open roads. Increases in substance abuse led to more impaired driving. Traffic enforcement was down. In addition, the average size and weight of American cars has been trending upward, causing [more](#)

[harm](#) to pedestrians, bicyclists and passengers in smaller cars.

While the number of pedestrian deaths has declined for two years in a row, the reductions pale in comparison to the increases of the preceding years, Fischer says. The figures also vary widely by state. Despite the overall decrease, slightly more states saw an increase in pedestrian deaths than a decrease in the first half of last year. States with the biggest numerical increases in pedestrian deaths were North Carolina, New Jersey and Missouri, while Texas, Florida and California saw the biggest numerical decreases.



Pedestrian deaths in the first half of 2024. Governors Highway Safety Association

California saw 65 fewer pedestrian killings in the first half of last year than it did during the same period the year prior. That reduction accounts for almost three-quarters of the net decrease in pedestrian deaths nationwide during the period. It was a 12.9 percent reduction in California deaths from the prior year.

“I think we’re making modest progress to reduce deaths and serious injuries on California roads. We welcomed the 12.9 percent decline in those numbers,” says Samantha DeMelo, a spokesperson for the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS). “For us, the only acceptable number of traffic deaths is zero, so we feel like we have a long way to go.”

DeMelo credited investments in infrastructure improvements and enforcement programs, including partnerships with California Highway Patrol, with stemming the growth of pedestrian deaths. The federal [Safe Streets and Roads for All program](#), created under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, has also helped California cities reduce risk on roadways, DeMelo says. Last fall, California OTS [announced](#) nearly 500 grants for safety improvement programs to local governments. DeMelo says the grants represented a 12

percent increase in funding for projects focused on bicycle and pedestrian safety from the previous fiscal year.

Most states and cities claim to pursue a [comprehensive approach](#) to improving traffic safety, with strategies focused on enforcement, education campaigns for drivers and other road users, and roadway design and engineering projects to reduce risk. But their priorities vary greatly. Advocates often argue that the third category, roadway design, is the one that makes the biggest difference in terms of safety for roadway users. Some researchers have called for treating traffic deaths as [a public health problem](#) and making infrastructure investments that reduce the overall risk of injury.

The GHSA, which represents state highway safety programs, backs a range of tactics to reduce pedestrian deaths, including investing in things like sidewalks, crosswalks and better lighting, recognizing that many pedestrian deaths occur at night.

“Infrastructure can make a huge difference,” Fischer says. “But infrastructure improvements don’t happen overnight. They take time.”

Wyoming, Montana and New Hampshire had the largest reductions in the overall rate of pedestrian deaths by population.



East Rock neighborhood, New Haven, Connecticut. Photo by Phil Langdon.

## [Health](#)

# Living In a Walkable Place Reduces Dementia

If you want to keep your marbles as you age—it pays to live in a place where you can walk, ride a bike, and move naturally.

[ROBERT STEUTEVILLE](#) MAR. 10, 2025

We should be planning and developing walkable neighborhoods for many reasons—rather than promoting car-oriented subdivisions, which have been the default method of outward city expansion for seven decades.

New studies come out all the time, all pointing in the same direction—walkability benefits health. Among the most frightful diseases, dementia is on the rise as our population ages. Dementia is scary because it has the potential to strip away our personality while we live—but environmental factors can increase or reduce risk.

One of those factors is walkability, according to a [meta-analysis of 54 studies](#) released a few weeks ago by the University of Georgia, working with other academic researchers. The findings build on other work of other studies that show similar results. When we live in a walkable place, we move more, naturally. Unsurprisingly, exercise is linked to better cognitive health. Regular exercise [increases memory](#), and boosts hippocampal volume by 2 percent.

Also, walkable neighborhoods are more stimulating. They are built on connected street networks, which give individuals more choices on how to get around and reward those choices with diverse physical paths linked to spatial memories. And they are mixed-use.

“Street layouts with better connectivity and walkability are associated with a reduced risk of cognitive impairment. Access to local amenities, such as food stores, community centers, and healthcare amenities, supports cognitive health,” the authors note.

Social connections also probably help. When you walk to a destination, you are more likely to have [friendly interactions](#), which have been shown to reduce the risk of depression, and walkable places also boost the [sense of community](#).

Walkability isn't the only environmental factor. “Exposure to park areas or green/blue spaces was generally associated with reduced dementia risk (by six percentage points).”

On the negative side, “Traffic-related exposures, including noise and proximity to major roads, were linked to worse cognitive performance and a higher risk of dementia.” For several years I lived on a main street that had been widened so that traffic often moved at over 40 mph, especially at night. That and the volume of traffic generated significant noise. I got used to it, but I remember the psychological relief I felt when I moved.

Our physical environment affects us in many more ways than we realize. But one thing is certain — living in a walkable place gives you an edge in both physical and mental health.

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# Utah DOT Installing Lights to Boost Pedestrian Safety

April 4, 2025



The Utah Department of Transportation is installing new “under-mast” lights statewide to improve safety for pedestrians at intersections. *[Above photo by Utah DOT]*

The agency said its engineers developed under-mast lights to boost visibility to areas where typical lighting can’t be installed; creating a spotlight in the exact area where a person might be walking, jogging, or rolling across.

“Crosswalk users can often see a car before the car sees them, especially at night,” noted David Townsend, Utah DOT traffic signal supervisor, in a [statement](#). “Under-mast lights immediately help a driver notice areas where they should be cautious. These lights will help crosswalk users and motorists be safer, exist harmoniously and confidently navigate to their destinations.”

To date, Utah DOT said it has installed approximately 150 under-mast lights across the state, with plans to add more soon. The agency added that under-mast lighting unit consists of a light emitting diode or LED light that can be attached to the bottom of a pre-existing signal pole’s arm, eliminating the need to pay for and install an entire new light post. This design also helps avoid complications with overhead power lines, which are often too close to safely work around.

By adding more light to intersections, Utah DOT said it hopes to improve safety for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. Since 2019, Utah roads have seen an average of 43 pedestrian fatalities, with nine having occurred so far in 2025.

“Under-mast lights may seem like a small change, but everything we do, from the smallest light installation to the creation of big, brand-new bridges is focused on making our roads safer,” Townsend said. “Adaptations like this are really important.”

Utah DOT noted that it will continue to watch for upcoming projects in areas where lighting is needed, with the goal of bolstering lighting at the crosswalks of every state-owned signalized intersection within the next five years.

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