

AASHTO SCOHTS: Ohio Safety Report

Ohio Traffic Deaths Rise 10% in 2015

Last year, Ohio saw a 10% increase in traffic deaths compared to 2014. In total, there were 1,110 fatalities compared with 1,008 in 2014.

We believe there were several factors that contributed to the increase:

- The economy improved, gas prices were lower and people drove more.
- Travel last year increased about 3 percent in Ohio and about 3.4 percent nationally.
- Gas prices plummeted by at least 30%.
- Ohio had a bad January and February for traffic deaths. It leveled off in March and April, then spiked in May, which was the worst May in a decade. August was also the worst in a decade.
- Overall, we had higher increases in crashes involving pedestrians, bicycles, older drivers, and large trucks.
- In December, we had 20 pedestrian-related deaths, the highest in 10 years. Many of these deaths occurred at night.
- However, the majority of traffic deaths in 2015 involved roadway departure, unbelted drivers and passengers, speed, alcohol and young drivers between the ages of 15 and 25.

So far this year, Ohio has had 255 traffic deaths compared to 245 this time last year.

Ohio is experiencing a sudden spike in wrong way traffic deaths. This year, we've had 16 deaths compared to eight last year. At least half of the crashes are alcohol related. An additional four crashes are pending alcohol tests. **The number of wrong way deaths this year is the second highest number in a decade - with nine more months to go.**

Ohio Using Freeway and Portable Signs to Publicize Traffic Deaths

In the summer of 2015, Ohio expanded its use of freeway and portable message signs to make the public and media aware of the significant increase in traffic deaths.

Each week, the department posted a message regarding the number or percentage increase in traffic deaths, and paired it with a NHTSA or state-supported message, such as "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over." ODOT also sent a statewide email to ODOT staff, Metropolitan Planning Agencies, Safe Communities, and other traffic safety partners that encouraged them to share the message across multiple platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and provided statistics and information to build on the weekly message.

While it's difficult to prove the effort made a difference in reducing traffic deaths, our tracking shows we made significant progress in slowing the overall increase in 2015. We started the freeway and portable message campaign in July with 19% more traffic deaths than in 2014. We finished the year at 10% more.

A multi-disciplinary committee met recently and decided that Ohio will continue this campaign in 2016. In addition, Ohio has taken the following steps:

- Established a multi-agency committee to review and develop campaign messages 3-6 months in advance.
- Ohio will continue to support established messages, such as “Click It or Ticket.” But, we plan to include a few creative messages to generate “buzz.”
- Messages will be posted twice a month (one weekday and a full weekend), instead of each week, to avoid excessive repetition.
- We are establishing a website to support the campaign, so our partners can download materials for distribution through their own outreach networks.
- We plan to provide more detailed guidance on when and where to use portable signs in support of statewide or local traffic safety messages.

ODOT Forms Statewide Committee to Combat Rise in Pedestrian Deaths

In 2015, Ohio experienced a 26.5% increase in pedestrian-related deaths compared to 2014. There were 119 pedestrian-related traffic deaths, which tied with 2012 for the highest number of pedestrian-related traffic deaths in the past decade.

As a result, ODOT and the Ohio Department of Health convened a statewide committee to examine pedestrian and bicycle safety issues. The committee included about 40 representatives from major bicycle advocacy groups, the Ohio Department of Aging, and local transportation and planning agencies from across the state. The committee met three times in the past six months to review historical crash trends and other data, discuss best practices and prioritize strategies.

Some of the committee’s recommendations include:

- Work with government agencies to adopt policies that encourage building sidewalks, crosswalks and other infrastructure that provides safe places for people to walk.
- Improve data collection techniques to better pinpoint where infrastructure is needed or populations are under served.
- Educate the public on the rules of the road – yielding to pedestrians, walking against traffic, appropriate places to cross, etc. Anecdotally, we think pedestrian travel is on the rise, and we need to develop a culture of mutual respect.

Over the past decade, ODOT and other government agencies have been increasing the amount of money spent on building and improving pedestrian infrastructure.

- Between 2010 and 2014, ODOT spent about \$36M on sidewalks and \$105M on bikeways/paths, which are also used by pedestrians.
- The department spends millions more on countdown pedestrian displays, sign upgrades, special crossing beacons and enhanced crosswalks that also improve pedestrian safety.

ODOT Takes Another Step in Integrating the HSM into Project Development

ODOT is revising the project development, design exception and resurfacing accident analysis processes to incorporate HSM principles and practices. The goal is to encourage ODOT staff and local partners to consider safety improvements in all project planning from minor resurfacing to major new projects.

To advance this goal, ODOT has created **Safety Integrated Project Maps** for each county. These maps identify Priority Safety Locations, where safety improvements should be considered when programming a project that overlaps one or more of these areas. (Note: The maps include all local and state roads except for low volume municipal roads.)

Locations are prioritized in red and blue. Red has a high priority and may qualify for Safety funding to make improvements. Blue has a lower priority, and districts are encouraged to explore low-cost safety improvements with their own forces and funds.

If a project qualifies for safety funds, an ODOT district office may request funding up to \$500,000 by submitting an abbreviated safety application. These applications can be submitted and reviewed anytime throughout the year. Requests under \$500,000 will be reviewed by ODOT Safety Staff to weigh the relative benefits of the safety improvement versus the cost.

Requests in excess of \$500,000 may be required to follow the bi-annual safety funding application process. This determination will be made by the Safety Program Manager on a case-by-case basis.

Ohio Hosts National Work Zone Awareness Week Kick Off

On April 12, ODOT hosted the National Work Zone Awareness Week kickoff with an event in Perrysburg, Ohio. The theme for this year's event was "Don't Be *that* Driver!"

"Out on the road, none of us wants to be *that* driver, who ruins someone's commute, day, or life," said Director Wray. "Instead, each of us wants to get home safely. In roadway work zones, engineers and construction workers make safety their top priority every day - for drivers as well as themselves. However, drivers need to do their part too."

The kickoff also honored the memory of highway workers, whose names appear on the National Work Zone Memorial. Among additions to the memorial this year are four former Ohioans: Lee Rizor, Amber Rooks, Shawn Blubaugh and John Fletcher.

Ohio Hosts Fifth Safe Routes to Schools National Conference

More than 500 attendees converged in downtown Columbus, Ohio on April 5, for a three-day national conference on Safe Routes to Schools. The theme was "Intersections: Where Health and Transportation Meet."

The conference featured dynamic keynote speakers, hands-on mobile workshops and more than 30 breakout sessions with six tracks on equity, health, partnerships, policy, safety and sustainability. The conference celebrated the 10th anniversary of SRTS and showcased a decade of progress making it safer for school children to walk and bike to school.

ODOT and MPOs Hosting Peer Exchange

This summer, ODOT and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission will host a peer exchange for the state's MPOs and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations. The purpose of the exchange is to review statewide safety planning efforts, share best practices and challenges, and develop common goals and safety performance targets. It will be a unique opportunity for regional planning agencies to share their work and better understand their role in transportation safety.

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