



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY

Pedestrian Safety

The Issue:

At one time or another, everyone is a pedestrian. Pedestrians are vulnerable roads users (VRU) because they lack the safety infrastructure of vehicles and thus are at higher risk of injury and death in collisions with vehicles. Curbing speed on roadways, upgrading roadway safety infrastructure and enhancing the conspicuity of pedestrians are essential components to improving pedestrian safety. Available vehicle safety technologies that mitigate or prevent pedestrian injuries and fatalities should be required in new vehicles with safety performance standards.

The Impact:

- In 2023, 7,314 pedestrians were killed in traffic crashes in the U.S.¹ While this represents a 3.7% decrease from 2022, it is still 16.6% more than the pre-pandemic count of 6,272 in 2019.²
- Compared to the recorded all-time low of pedestrian fatalities in 2009, pedestrian fatalities are up 78%.³
- While pedestrian fatalities in 2024 are estimated to decline by 4%, this is still 12% above pre-pandemic numbers.⁴
- On average in 2023, a pedestrian was killed approximately every 72 minutes.⁵
- In 2023, an estimated 68,244 pedestrians were injured in traffic crashes in the U.S., which equates to a pedestrian being injured approximately every eight minutes.⁶

The Facts:

- In 2023, pedestrian deaths accounted for 18% of all traffic fatalities.⁷
- Crashes involving pedestrians resulted in \$17.6 billion in economic costs and \$112.5 billion in comprehensive costs in 2019.⁸ Accounting for inflation alone, this would equate to \$22.2 billion in economic costs and \$142 billion in comprehensive costs in 2025.⁹
- 84% of pedestrian fatalities occurred in an urban setting in 2023.¹⁰
- 74% of pedestrian fatalities occurred at locations that were not intersections in 2023.¹¹
- 77% of pedestrian fatalities occurred in the dark, as opposed to during daylight, dusk, or dawn, in 2023.¹²

- In 2023, 17% of all children (ages 14 and younger) killed in traffic crashes were pedestrians.¹³
- 89% of pedestrian fatalities occurred in single vehicle crashes in 2023, and of those 85.2% were struck by the front of the vehicle.¹⁴
- A AAA Foundation for Safety Study found that the risk of severe injury for a pedestrian struck by a vehicle reaches 50% at 31 miles per hour, and the average risk of death reaches 50% at 42 mph.¹⁵

Frontovers:

- Vehicles can be deadly to pedestrians even when not moving fast. Situations where a vehicle, moving forward slowly, strikes and injures or kills a vulnerable road user is called a “frontover.”
- Many vehicles have blind zones in front of the vehicle related to the height of the hood and bumper, or while turning, that cover areas where children, those using wheelchairs and in the case of some large vehicles even smaller statured adults, might not be seen by an operator and inadvertently struck.¹⁶
- A number of frontover situations occur off public roads, where traditional crash data collection occurs, and as a result fatality and injury figures are likely underrepresentative.
 - According to NHTSA, on average each year nearly 450 people are killed in non-traffic crashes involving forward moving vehicles, and another 12,600 are injured.¹⁷

The Solutions: Technology and Roadway Safety Infrastructure

Vehicle Safety Technology and Safety Standards Can Protect Vehicle Occupants and Other Road Users

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) must expeditiously advance minimum performance standards for vehicle safety technologies which can prevent or mitigate crashes and protect vehicle occupants and road users. These safety technologies should be standard, not optional, equipment in new vehicles. This action will achieve safety equity by both ensuring that the technology responds to and benefits all road users and that consumers buying new vehicles are not charged extra fees for the technology. Moreover, requiring equipment as standard can reduce the base cost of technology due to economies of scale.

Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS):

- According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, equipping all cars, pickup trucks, vans, minivans and SUVs with forward collision warning (FCW)/automatic emergency braking (AEB) which respond to pedestrians/bicyclists as well as vehicles could prevent 1.9 million crashes, nearly 900,000 injuries, and more than 4,700 deaths annually.¹⁸
- The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, Pub. L. 117-58) directs the U.S. DOT to issue Final Rules on minimum performance standards and requirements for

ADAS technologies including AEB, FCW, lane departure warning (LDW) and lane keeping assist (LKA).¹⁹

- In May 2024, U.S. DOT issued a Final Rule to require passenger vehicles be equipped with AEB that detect pedestrians.²⁰ NHTSA estimates that this action will save 362 lives and mitigate over 24,000 injuries annually. It is estimated to result in yearly cost benefit of between \$5.8-\$7.2 billion.²¹ In July 2023, DOT issued a NPRM to require heavy vehicles weighing over 10,000 pounds to be equipped with AEB.²² A second NPRM is expected to be issued in December 2025.
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- A 2025 study found that AEB systems in modern vehicles (model years 2021-2023) reduced front-to-rear crashes by 52%.
 - The same study found that Pedestrian AEB systems in vehicles (model years 2015-2023) reduced single-vehicle frontal crashes with non-motorists by 9%.²⁷

Vulnerable road user impact protection:

- In September of 2024, the NHTSA published an NPRM to specify vehicle performance standards to mitigate the risk of serious to fatal injuries in contacts between pedestrians and vehicle hood components in the case of a vulnerable road user collision.²⁸
- NHTSA research on pedestrian crashes has identified head and lower extremities as frequent locations of serious injuries in pedestrian crashes.²⁹
- In May 2023, NHTSA published a Request for Comments (RFC) on a proposal to update the New Car Assessment Program (NCAP) to include information about crashworthiness pedestrian protection.³⁰
 - NHTSA estimates that taking such action will result in 476 lives saved and 32,907 injuries prevented annually.³¹
- Consumers in the U.S. are continuing to purchase pickup trucks, vans/minivans and SUVs, with these vehicles accounting for 81.3% of new vehicle sales in 2023.³² The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) has found evidence suggesting that vehicles with higher, more vertical front ends pose greater risk to pedestrians.³³

Speed Curbing Technology:

- Speed assistance systems, such as intelligent speed assistance (ISA), can provide information to drivers about present speed limits, warn drivers when a vehicle

speed is above the limit, prevent a vehicle from exceeding the speed limit, or maintain a set speed.³⁴ Rating this technology in new vehicles as part of an improved NCAP, as is already done in Europe, could incentivize automakers to equip more U.S. models with speed assistance systems. ISA is now required on all new vehicles sold in Europe as of July 2024.³⁵

Adaptive Driving Beam Headlights:

- With 77% of pedestrian fatalities occurring in the dark,³⁶ improvements to vehicle lighting would afford drivers additional time to identify and respond accordingly to pedestrians in the roadway.
- Adaptive driving beam (ADB) headlights are a lighting technology which uses headlight beam modification to increase illumination of the road while avoiding glare to other traffic.
- In 2022, the NHTSA published a Final Rule allowing but not requiring, ADB systems on passenger vehicles.³⁷

Road Safety Infrastructure Improvements and the Safe System Approach³⁸

The Safe System Approach (SSA) assumes that humans will make mistakes and that we must anticipate this and make accommodations to account for limited human injury tolerances through five elements: Safe Vehicles, Safe Road Users, Safe Roads, Safe Speed and Post-Crash Care. By improving the design and operation of roadways to accommodate all road users safely, the SSA seeks to avoid conflicts between road users (drivers of vehicles, motorcycle riders, pedestrians, bicyclists, micromobility riders, wheelchair users and others) and minimize impact forces when they do occur to prevent fatalities and serious injuries.

Infrastructure improvements consistent with the SSA to limit conflicts include:

Curbing speed:

- This can be accomplished by reducing speed limits, employing automated enforcement to augment traditional enforcement, adding speed humps, using real-time speed feedback signs, performing road diets and installing roundabouts.

Prioritizing infrastructure to promote safety:

- This includes changes such as adding lighting and adjusting sight lines, leading intervals, pedestrian hybrid beacons, curb extensions, accessible sidewalks, rumble strips, protected intersections, separated bike lanes, and road separations that consider all users.

Localities can advance these and other infrastructure improvements systemically by requiring their adoption as appropriate in all road design and maintenance projects.

The IIJA includes multiple provisions that advance the SSA including expanded funding for safety infrastructure upgrades. It also provides support and guidance for localities planning to apply for such, permits use of certain federal funds for automated enforcement programs in school and work zones, directs requirements for vehicle safety

improvements including crash avoidance technologies, and ensures funds are used to improve vulnerable road user safety.

October 2025

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- ⁶ Traffic Safety Facts: 2023 Data, Pedestrians, NHTSA, Jun. 2025, DOT HS 813 727, available at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813727>.
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