Dangerous by Design 2026: Understanding America's pedestrian safety crisis

MIPS Annual Meeting
July 2026

Smart Growth AMERICA

SGA's MISSION

Smart Growth America envision a country where transportation, housing, and development choices create communities that are healthy, prosperous, and resilient—no matter where you live or who you are.

We help create healthy, prosperous, and resilient places to live for all people through research, advocacy, and direct community support.

While the U.S. celebrates…

DIVE BRIEF

US traffic deaths in 2025 lowest since 2019

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates have shown continued declines in roadway fatalities since 2022.

Published April 2, 2026

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There was some very encouraging news in early estimates of traffic deaths in 2025 released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration NHTSA, including: ...more

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Standing before a wall of 4,000 car keys — representing the number of people injured in distracted driving crashes every four and a half days — NHTSA Administrator Jonathan Morrison announced the good news that road fatalities declined significantly in 2025. https://lnkd.in/eDcsfVXW

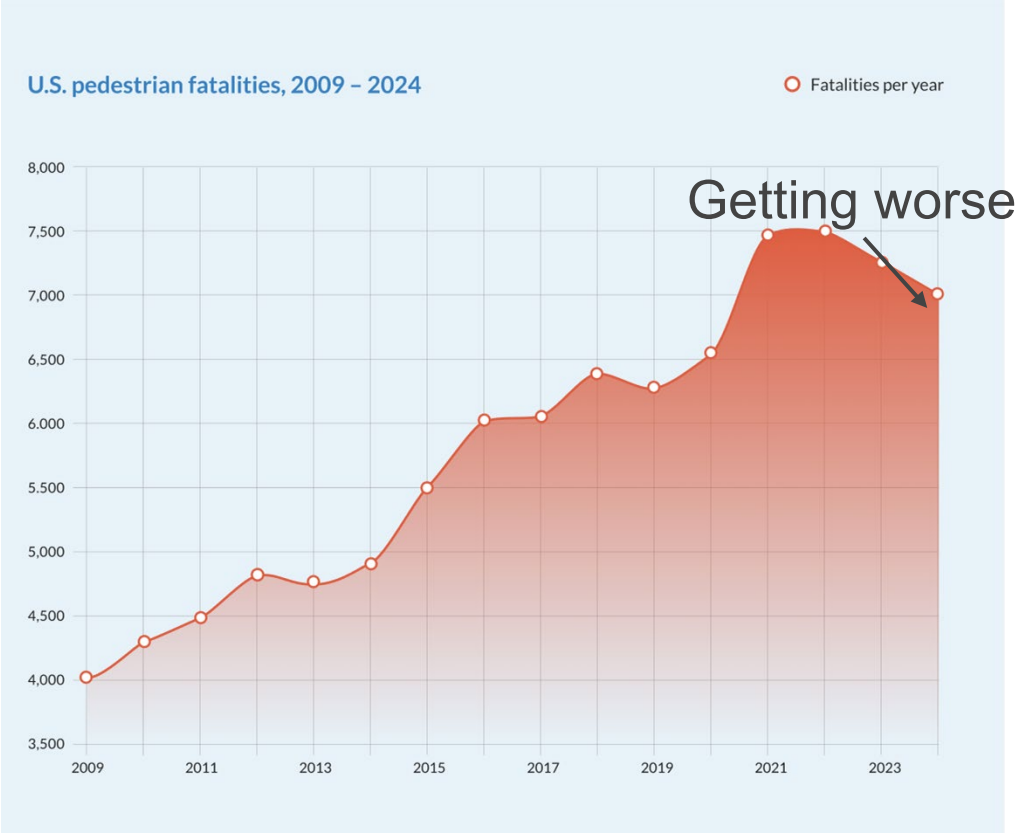


Road fatalities declined significantly in 2025

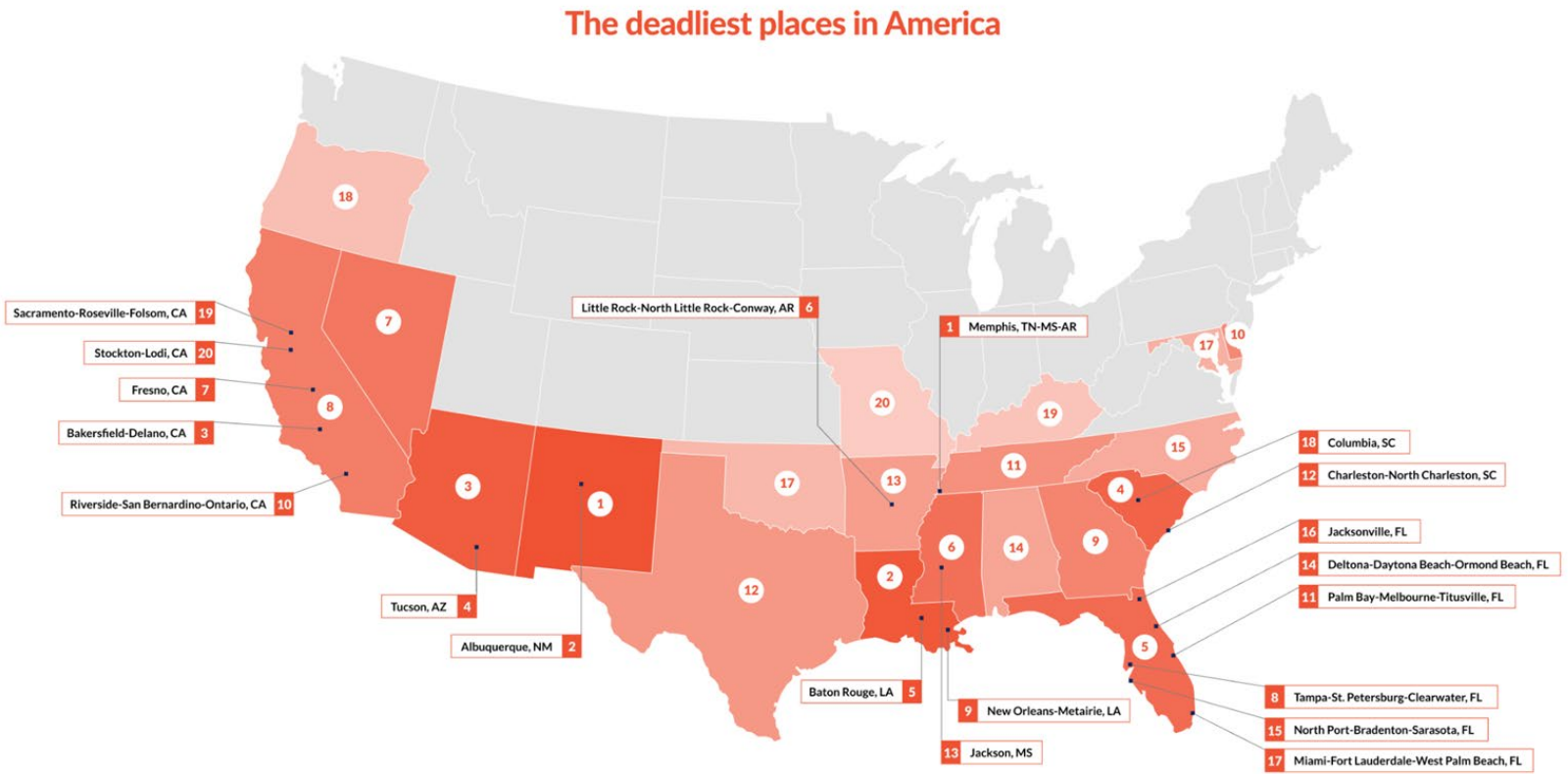
People are being killed

72% Increase in Pedestrian Fatalities 2009 – 2024

At this pace, the U.S. won't reach 2009 levels until 2042
An additional 96,615 people would die in the meantime



Dangerous by Design 2026



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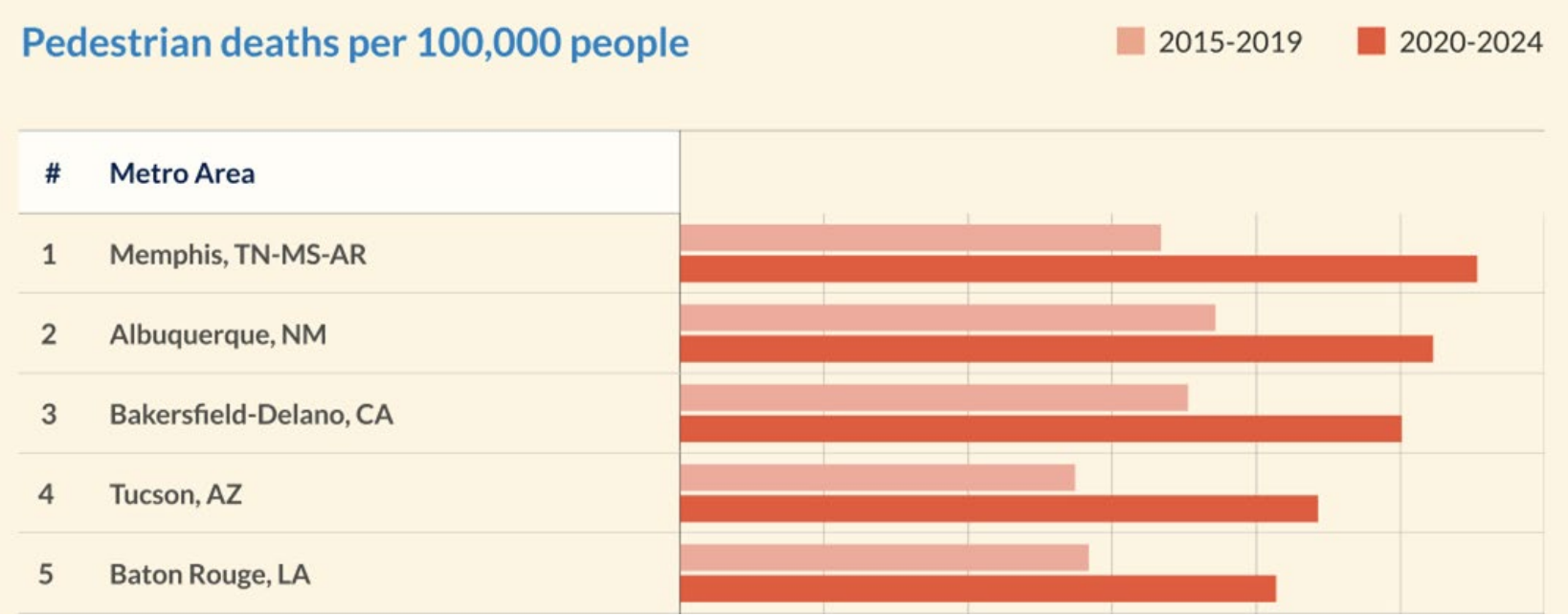
Pedestrian deaths per 100,000 by race and ethnicity (2020-24)



American Indian and Alaska Native	7.9
Black or African American	3.67
Total U.S. Pedestrian Fatality Rate	2.15
Hispanic or Latino	1.99
White, Non-Hispanic	1.6
Asian American and Pacific Islander	.87

Memphis continues to top the charts

Memphis, in the second straight report, ranks as the deadliest metro area for pedestrians in the United States, with a **pedestrian fatality rate of 5.5, the highest fatality rate ever recorded in Dangerous by Design.**



Places improved their rankings but got more dangerous

A change in ranking does not necessarily mean lives were saved. For example, Charleston, SC moved down from #9 to #12. Tucson, AZ "improved" from #3 to #4. Both saw increased fatality rates; other metro areas simply got worse faster. **18 of the 101 metro areas saw decreases, only 5 maintained progress from the previous report.**

Rank	Metro Area	Avg. annual pedestrian fatality rate per 100k people (2020-2024)
1	Memphis, TN-MS-AR	5.5
2	Albuquerque, NM	5.32
3	Bakersfield-Delano, CA	5.01
4	Tucson, AZ	4.43
5	Baton Rouge, LA	4.18
6	Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway, AR	4.17
7	Fresno, CA	4.06
8	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	3.74
9	New Orleans-Metairie, LA	3.73
10	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	3.73
11	Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, FL	3.7
12	Charleston-North Charleston, SC	3.69

19 of the 20 most dangerous states made no progress

New Mexico has the highest pedestrian rate of all states, nearly a full death per 100k people behind the next closest, Louisiana. **Delaware had the largest reduction of any state and is still the 10th most deadly.**



States trending most deadly: between 2015-2019 and 2020-2024

New Mexico	▲ 0.89%
Mississippi	▲ 0.86%
Louisiana	▲ 0.83%
Arkansas	▲ 0.75%
Texas	▲ 0.75%
South Carolina	▲ 0.65%

States have the power to significantly reduce pedestrian fatalities

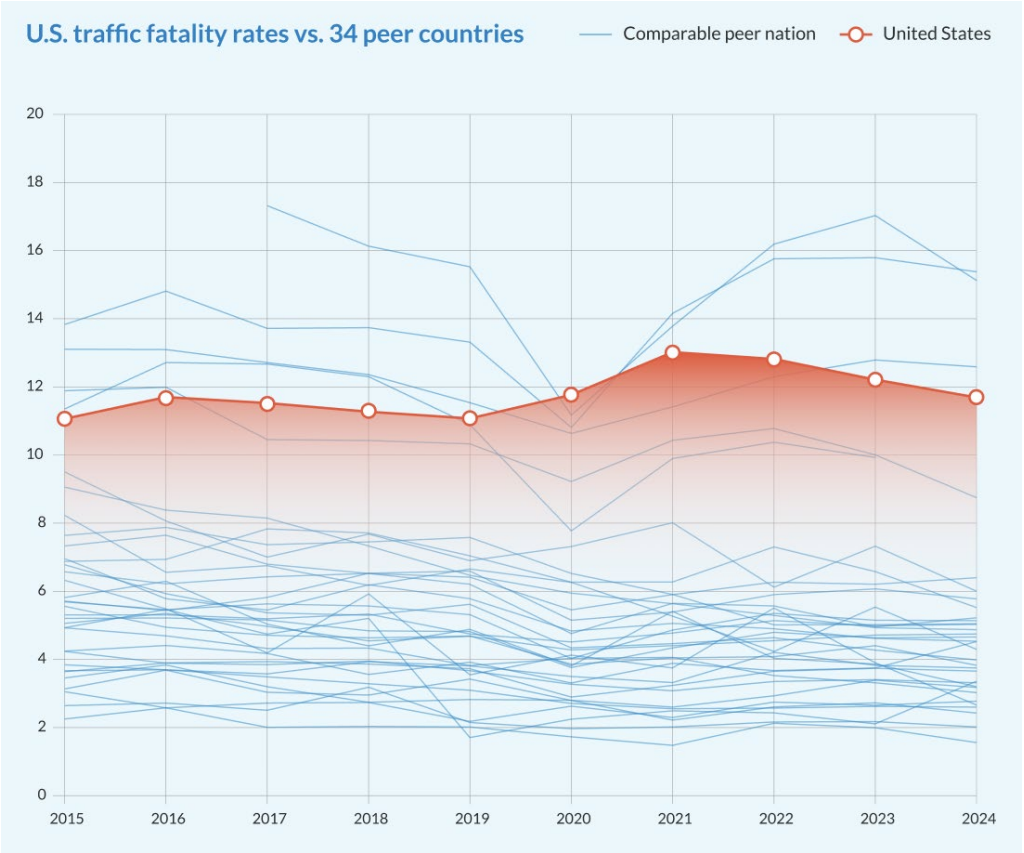
Over half of pedestrian fatalities took place on state-owned roads. 3,609 of the pedestrian fatalities in 2024 occurred on state-owned roads. If state DOTs acted upon their oft-stated priority of “safety first”, they could save thousands of lives each year. State roads saw a drop of 4.93% in all roadway fatalities between 2023 and 2024.



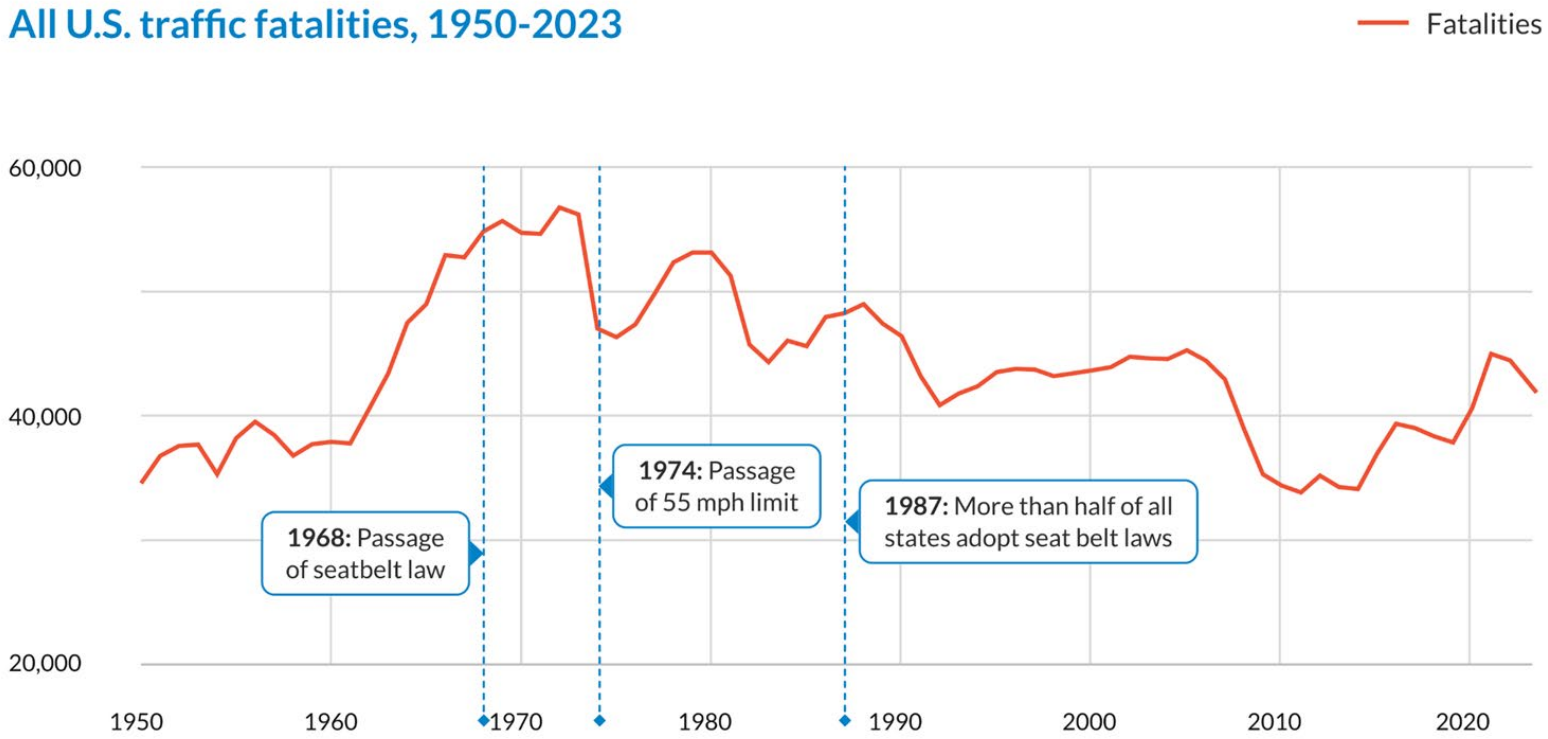
A uniquely American problem

As other countries made their roads significantly safer, pedestrian fatalities in **the U.S. *increased* by 45 percent, from 4,884 to 7,080.**

If the U.S. had simply been able to emulate the progress of these 34 peer nations in the developed world, **63,441 lives otherwise lost to traffic violence could have been saved over the last decade alone.**



It’s not impossible, this is preventable

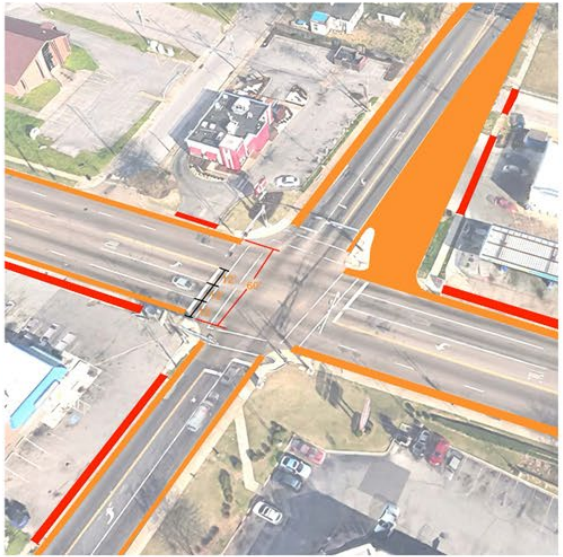


We know what works



Existing conditions

The intersection of Jackson Avenue and Hollywood Street in Memphis, TN, has experienced multiple pedestrian fatalities. Wide lanes, frequent driveways, and long crossing distances create challenges for people walking.



Opportunity for change

The orange and red areas highlight space that could be reallocated to improve safety, visibility, and comfort without impeding traffic flow.



A safer design

The redesigned intersection includes improved crosswalks, shorter driveways, expanded pedestrian space, and street trees. Together, these changes create a safer and more comfortable environment for people walking and biking.