# NATIONAL ROADWAY SAFETY STRATEGY

2026

SAFER PEOPLE. SAFER ROADS. SAFER VEHICLES.


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250
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# Letter from Secretary Duffy

**The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) is dedicated to saving lives on our Nation's roadways.** Despite encouraging trends over the past few years, we estimate that 36,640 people died in motor vehicle crashes in 2025.[1] Millions more were seriously injured. Most Americans, myself included, know someone who has died or been involved in a serious crash, and those losses affect everyone—family members, friends, coworkers. **Communities across the country feel the impact of motor vehicle crashes**, and rural and Tribal communities shoulder a higher share than urban areas.

**America's families deserve better**. This National Roadway Safety Strategy (NRSS) is a roadmap to reducing fatalities and serious injuries. The Department is restoring safety to our roads by getting back to basics, including partnering with law enforcement to get dangerous drivers off the road, empowering our State and local partners through grant programs, and educating the public about risky driving behaviors. We are committed to making our roadways safer and bringing down the number of fatalities.

The NRSS outlines three core objectives—**Safer People, Safer Roads, and Safer Vehicles**—and emphasizes DOT's commitment to drive fatalities toward zero. We will achieve this by ensuring that truck drivers are appropriately licensed and qualified, designing roads that keep us both safe and moving, giving Americans access to affordable vehicles with the latest safety technologies, and supporting law enforcement and first responders in their critical work. We will take action based on robust data and analysis, and we will partner and collaborate across all levels of government and industry to amplify our impact.

President Trump and I have committed to **deliver the Golden Age of Transportation to the American people**. However, we can't get there if we continue to lose tens of thousands of Americans to impaired driving, unsafe and illegal truck drivers, and other senseless crashes every year. The Golden Age of Transportation means that parents make it home from work, kids arrive at school safely, freight moves around the country without jeopardizing lives, and critical workers who build and maintain our infrastructure can go about their days without fear of injury or death.

Making considerable progress toward this vision is not just possible, it is essential. Though recent trends are promising, we can't take our attention off the road ahead. The NRSS outlines our focus for the coming years, and DOT invites you to work with us toward a new era of roadway safety through Safer People, Safer Roads, and Safer Vehicles.

**SEAN DUFFY**
Secretary of Transportation

[1] https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813800

# The National Roadway Safety Strategy

This National Roadway Safety Strategy (NRSS) outlines DOT's approach to reducing deaths and serious injuries on our Nation's roadways significantly, including focus areas and key actions.

Zero is the only acceptable number of deaths on our highways, roads, and streets. DOT will pursue this goal through three core objectives: Safer People, Safer Roads, and Safer Vehicles.

- **Safer People:** Everyone deserves to arrive home safely every day. DOT will prioritize keeping families safe in all communities, especially in rural areas and on Tribal lands. DOT will support the law enforcement officers, emergency responders, and transportation workers who perform important duties that keep people safe.
- **Safer Roads:** Smart design builds safer roads. DOT will keep traffic moving without compromising safety, improve traffic incident management to reduce secondary crashes, and end dangerous commercial trucking practices for good.
- **Safer Vehicles:** America must lead the world in vehicle safety and safety technology. DOT will leverage next-generation technology in vehicles to reduce preventable road deaths.

The NRSS will continue to embrace a holistic approach and a resilient transportation system that anticipates human mistakes and provides multiple layers of protection. These layers are intended to prevent crashes from occurring and keep them from becoming fatal when they do. This concept draws from established practices in the transportation sector such as the Safe System Approach.[2]

The NRSS is a collaboration between the Office of the Secretary of Transportation (OST) and the six Operating Administrations (OAs) that implement programs to advance roadway safety:

- The **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)** establishes and enforces vehicle performance standards, researches and develops programs to improve behavioral safety, and partners with State, local, and Tribal governments on roadway safety initiatives.
- The **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** supports State, local, and Tribal governments in the safe design, construction, and maintenance of the Nation's roadways, tunnels, and bridges.
- The **Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA)** regulates and provides safety oversight of commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) such as trucks and buses, and improves CMV safety through regulation, education, enforcement, research, and technology.
- The **Federal Railroad Administration (FRA**) improves the safety of the rail industry workforce and the public at locations where rail infrastructure intersects roadways.
- The **Federal Transit Administration (FTA)** provides safety oversight and technical assistance to strengthen local transit safety and transit worker safety.

[2] The Safe System Approach involves anticipating human mistakes by designing and managing the transportation ecosystem to keep the risk of a mistake low; and when a mistake leads to a crash, the impact on the human body doesn't result in a fatality or serious injury. This is a shift from a conventional safety approach because it focuses on both human mistakes and human vulnerability and designs a system with many redundancies in place to protect everyone. https://highways.dot.gov/safety/zero-deaths

- The **Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA)** advances the safe transportation of hazardous materials in commerce on roadways and other modes of transportation.

DOT will pursue each of the NRSS objectives outlined above through focus areas and corresponding actions, representing specific steps the Department intends to take in support of substantial roadway safety improvements. The remainder of this document highlights each NRSS objective and its corresponding focus areas and key actions.

# Safer People

Everyone deserves to arrive home safely every day. To support Safer People, DOT will:

- Keep Families Safe
- Prioritize Rural and Tribal Communities
- Reengage Law Enforcement
- Help First Responders Save Lives

## Keep Families Safe

American journeys big and small—driving to work, walking a child to school, or taking a road trip—should be safe. Keeping families safe also means protecting critical transportation workers so they make it home to their family each night. No family should ever have to endure the preventable loss of a loved one in a crash. Yet every day, America's families encounter danger from drivers who are impaired, distracted, or speeding. Of the 39,254 fatalities on our roads in 2024, about one-third involved speeding, and one-third involved alcohol impairment.[3] Young people are especially at risk; motor vehicle crashes are one of the leading causes of unintentional death for younger Americans (age 15-24), and young drivers (age 15-20) are at the highest risk of being involved in a fatal crash out of any age group.[4]

To make the Nation's roads safer for our families, DOT will rebuild a culture of safety and responsibility where safe driving habits—such as staying alert, buckling up, and avoiding impairment—become the standard for every person behind the wheel.

***NRSS Key Activities***

- Champion safety initiatives to get children and families home safely, including educational and outreach campaigns, enforcement against illegal school bus passing, and encouraging the deployment of effective countermeasures to promote family safety.

## Prioritize Rural and Tribal Communities

Roadway safety is not a "one size fits all" issue, especially for those living in rural and Tribal areas. In 2024, rural areas accounted for 31 percent of vehicle miles traveled and just over 20 percent of the

[3] https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813791
[4] https://www.nhtsa.gov/book/countermeasures-that-work/young-drivers

U.S. population, yet 41 percent of deaths occurred on rural roads.[5] Residents in these communities face unique challenges when trying to reach schools, jobs, local businesses, and healthcare. Although rural America is a critical conduit for the traveling public, many rural and Tribal communities have limited resources to invest in safety projects aimed at preventing crashes. Crash reporting and response times also tend to be longer in rural areas, delaying access to medical care compared to crashes that occur in urban areas. The impacts are particularly evident on Tribal lands, where data reveal high rates of traffic fatalities.[6]

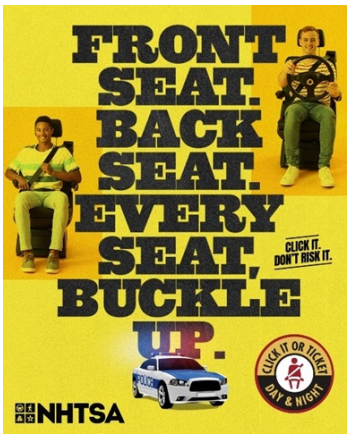
DOT aims to address the elevated risk faced by rural and Tribal communities by engaging directly with these communities through outreach, training, and prioritized rural and Tribal resources, including efforts to improve access to post-crash care.

***NRSS Key Activities***

- Engage with Tribal communities on roadway safety issues to promote resources, including education and outreach campaigns, and provide information on dedicated transportation topics, such as hazardous materials safety.
- Improve roadway safety in rural communities by connecting rural America with tools, resources, and technical assistance through the OAs and the Department's Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative.[7]

## Reengage Law Enforcement

Active law enforcement on our roadways helps deter dangerous driving behaviors before they escalate into life-altering crashes. In 2024, speeding killed 11,288 people and alcohol impairment was linked to 11,904 deaths.[8] Nearly half of all vehicle occupant fatalities were unbelted. Effective enforcement is a critical tool for preventing these and other traffic-related deaths and injuries. Roadside safety inspections of commercial vehicles and their drivers help verify compliance with safety regulations. Law enforcement ensures commercial and transit safety and provides life-saving care to crash victims as part of the post-crash emergency response system.




DOT will renew engagement with the Nation's enforcement community to carry out this vital work to help protect the public and ensure our streets remain safe for every traveler.

[5] https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813791; https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2024/vm1.cfm; https://data.census.gov./table/ACSSE2024.K200101?g=010XX00US_010XX01US_010XX43US&y=2024&d=ACS+1-Year+Supplemental+Estimates

[6] CDC Tribal Road Safety. August 4, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/tribal-road-safety/about/index.html

[7] https://www.transportation.gov/rural

[8] https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813791

***NRSS Key Activities***

- Implement the Pathways to Safer Streets action plan, including reviving data-driven support tools for law enforcement and providing additional technical assistance to States.[9]
- Enhance and expand commercial motor vehicle enforcement to improve the impact of roadside safety inspections, reduce crash risk in high-crash corridors, and protect all roadway users.

## Help First Responders Save Lives

Of the thousands of people who died of injuries from a motor vehicle crash each year, approximately 40 percent were alive when first responders arrived. For these individuals, a fast response is the difference between a tragedy and a homecoming. In rural areas, about 39 percent of fatal crash victims do not arrive at a hospital for one to two hours from the time of the crash, compared to 10 percent in urban areas.[10] This delay in care is critical—for crash victims who need blood transfusions, every minute of delay in administering blood increases their risk of death by 11 percent. Solutions like prehospital blood transfusions—allowing first responders to deliver blood transfusions at a crash scene or enroute to a hospital—can save up to 37 percent of trauma patients with severe bleeding.[11]

Equipping the next generation of emergency responders is more than a technical upgrade; it is a critical step to eliminate preventable roadway deaths. Prehospital blood transfusion programs coupled with 911 call-taking protocols are promising tools that support faster, more informed responses. Investing in these life-saving advancements can help ensure more parents, children, and spouses return home to the families who need them. DOT will improve public safety infrastructure and expand post-crash care to save lives.

***NRSS Key Activities***

- Bolster crash prevention and post-crash care by supporting the implementation of 911 call-taking protocols and prehospital blood transfusion capabilities through initiatives such as the Safe Streets and Roads for All grant program.

[9] https://www.nhtsa.gov/pathways-to-safer-streets
[10] https://www.ems.gov/issues/ems-highway-safety-and-post-crash-care/
[11] https://www.ems.gov/issues/prehospital-blood-transfusion/

# Safer Roads

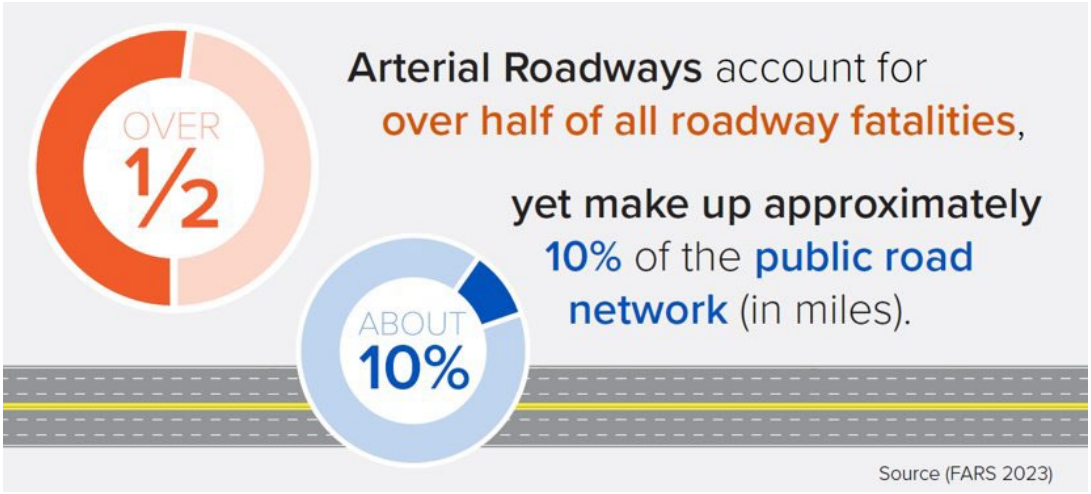
A safe road moves people and goods efficiently and without delay, prevents crashes, protects road workers, and reduces crash severity through smart design. As the backbone of the Nation's freight network, motor carriers and commercial drivers are a critical element of the roadway system and must act responsibly to protect the safety of all road users.

To support Safer Roads, DOT will:

- Promote Design that Makes Roads Safer
- Improve Safety and Alleviate Congestion
- Stop Unsafe Commercial Vehicle Operations

## Promote Design that Makes Roads Safer

Designing safer roads can prevent crashes, reduce the severity of the crashes and improve access to emergency care when crashes do occur. The Department promotes the use of evidence-based engineering interventions and innovative practices that can significantly enhance the safety of America's roadway infrastructure. Roadway risks can vary—independent of other factors—by road type, conditions, and geography. For example, over half of all traffic deaths occur on arterial roads despite constituting about ten percent of the public road network.[12]




Meanwhile, more than half of all fatalities occur at night, even though only 25 percent of travel happens during hours of darkness.[13] Investing in locations known to be at higher risk for crashes and applying proven roadway designs and countermeasures can allow us to transform the Nation's infrastructure into a safe, efficient, and beautiful space for travelers. Where roads meet rails, such

[12] NHTSA, Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS): 2019-2022 Final File and 2023 Annual Report File
[13] https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813791; https://highways.dot.gov/safety/proven-safety-countermeasures/lighting#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20fatal%20crashes,the%20chances%20of%20a%20crash

as highway-rail grade crossings, opportunities exist to use robust design, innovative technologies, and grade separations to address safety and improve the traffic flow on both roads and rails.

***NRSS Key Activities***

- Promote infrastructure design practices that remove high risk road conditions and deploy proven countermeasures that save lives, prevent crashes, and make our roads safer for everyone.

## Improve Safety and Alleviate Congestion

A safe road is an efficient road and vice versa. Designing roads to mitigate crashes helps to remove one of the primary causes of unexpected congestion, improving efficiency. Investing in incident response and recovery can also help address both safety and efficiency by preventing secondary crashes, which originate from the congestion caused by an earlier crash and account for an estimated 20 percent of all collisions.

Intersections are another prime focus area for joint investments in safety and congestion mitigation, as they represent over a quarter of annual roadway fatalities. Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) solutions, such as LiDAR-equipped adaptive signal control technology, can simultaneously reduce congestion and improve safety at intersections by quickly adjusting signal timing to real-time traffic conditions. Enhanced digital infrastructure and other communication tools could provide additional benefits to the whole transportation system.

Improving safety also means protecting the people who build and maintain our roads. Work zones account for more than 800 fatalities annually. Strategies to improve work zone and worker safety include enforcement, lighting, positive protection devices, positive work area protection (such as barriers), personal protective equipment for workers, and coordination of road work activities. Prioritizing safe work zone environments and improving incident response training and coordination can improve crash outcomes, prevent secondary crashes, and create safer working conditions for America's road-building workforce, all while reducing congestion.

***NRSS Key Activities***

- Improve road safety through effective traffic management practices, including improved nighttime visibility, work zone safety measures, improved traffic flow, additional training for transportation incident management and reduced travel delays.
- Support the deployment of ITS and Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) to prevent crashes and protect all road users.

## Stop Unsafe Commercial Vehicle Operations


The Nation relies on commercial vehicles such as trucks and motorcoaches to move people and goods, including hazardous materials, but roadways cannot be safe if unsafe trucking operations persist. Over 5,300 people died in large truck crashes in 2024.[14] The majority of truck drivers and motor carriers operate responsibly, but unsafe operators affect the safety of everyone on the roads.

Accountability and adherence to the law will keep roads safe for America's trucking industry and families alike. State driver's licensing agencies and commercial driving schools must be vigilant to ensure only eligible, trained people receive commercial driver's licenses, and do not unlawfully license people who are ineligible or unqualified to drive a truck. Reforming commercial driver licensing, training practices, and safe commercial driving standards can prevent unqualified drivers from operating on America's roadways. Safety investigators play an important role in ensuring vehicles are safe and have qualified drivers at the wheel. Results of investigations help identify unsafe motor carriers and deceptive networks (such as chameleon carriers) that flaunt safety requirements.

Truck drivers also face an unfair conundrum when it comes to finding safe parking for their rest break. A shortage of truck parking nationwide forces many truck drivers to choose between cutting their driving hours short to secure a parking space or risk driving beyond acceptable limits in terms of fatigue and hours of service as they search for parking. Providing drivers with safe, designated places to park reduces the use of locations like highway shoulders, freeway exit or entrance ramps, vacant lots, and side streets. Infrastructure investments, complemented by technology, can help America's truck drivers safely drive a full shift, rest when they need to, and keep America's freight moving.

***NRSS Key Activities***

- Strengthen compliance standards and increase investigative efforts to target high risk motor carriers and deceptive business entities, and bolster oversight of programs for licensing safe, qualified commercial drivers.
- Elevate truck parking initiatives to promote safe and efficient movement of goods by expanding availability of truck parking through DOT funding programs.

[14] https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813791

# Safer Vehicles

American companies have led the world in deploying vehicle safety technologies. Advanced technologies in motor vehicles will be vital in preventing and mitigating the severity of crashes.

To support Safer Vehicles, DOT will:

- Integrate Lifesaving Technology into Vehicles
- Promote the Safe Deployment of Automated Vehicles

## Integrate Lifesaving Technology into Vehicles

The role of vehicle safety performance in avoiding or mitigating the harm of crashes is critical. NHTSA's safety standards—covering braking and tire performance, airbags and seatbelts, anti-lock brakes and stability control, fuel system integrity and passenger compartment integrity—saved more than 860,000 lives between their introduction in 1968 and 2019.[15] This represents nearly the population of the city of Indianapolis, all saved from a premature death thanks to vehicle technologies.

Though earlier technologies like air bags, seat belts, and vehicle crumple zones work together to protect the people inside a motor vehicle when a crash occurs, successive generations of safety technology have increasingly focused on preventing certain crashes from occurring in the first place. For example, the deployment of Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB) across the entire passenger car and light truck fleet is expected to save lives by detecting an imminent crash with another vehicle or when a pedestrian is in front of a vehicle and automatically applying the brakes if the driver has not. Enhancing vehicle safety performance and occupant protection also involves using data from advanced crash test dummies, modernizing safety performance standards, identifying potential safety defects, and overseeing recalls.

With over 284 million vehicles on the road, integration of new technologies into the fleet can be a slow process as new vehicles replace existing ones. Therefore, it is critical for DOT to encourage and accelerate the deployment of proven safety technologies.[16] When crashes do occur, technologies such as Advanced Automatic Crash Notification (AACN) systems can provide critical information to emergency responders by instantly transmitting precise crash data, supporting faster and more informed post-crash care. The Department is committed to a performance-based regulatory environment that prioritizes American innovation without compromising our rigorous safety mission. This modernization effort ensures Federal standards focus on the safety outcomes a vehicle must achieve, rather than mandating specific hardware or designs, effectively removing technical barriers that no longer serve a safety function. These actions will support American innovation, protect consumer choice, and ensure vehicle affordability.

[15] https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/nhtsa-50-years-vehicle-safety-standards-saved-hundreds-thousands-lives-prevented

[16] https://www.bts.gov/content/number-us-aircraft-vehicles-vessels-and-other-conveyances; https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/travel_monitoring/20augtvt/figure2.cfm; https://www.bts.gov/content/average-age-automobiles-and-trucks-operation-united-states

***NRSS Key Activities***

- Enhance crash protection for both male and female motor vehicle occupants by implementing the use of advanced crash test dummies into Federal standards and New Car Assessment Program crash tests.
- Modernize Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards and Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards by stripping away vestigial, design-forcing rules in favor of performance standards focused on safety outcomes.

## Promote the Safe Deployment of Automated Vehicles

Automated Vehicles (AVs) are on the Nation's roads today in select locations, and have collectively driven over a hundred million miles over the past few years.[17] Once deployed safely at scale, AVs hold potential to reduce crash risks substantially because they are not subject to human factors issues like distraction, fatigue, or impairment.[18] Yet, that potential can be reached only by first prioritizing safety in testing, deployment, and operations, and ensuring effective communication with public safety systems as they continue to operate in more locations across the Nation.

The Department is working to support the safe deployment of AVs, leading the world to improve safety and innovation. DOT continues to adapt its approaches to the future of motor vehicle technology, including by continuing its safety oversight and enforcement and pursuing how to remove barriers to AV deployment safely. DOT is prepared for a transportation system that includes both human-driven and automated vehicles. When motor vehicle design or technologies pose unreasonable public safety risks, DOT will take action to investigate issues, oversee recalls, and ensure the remedy of vehicle defects.

***NRSS Key Activities***

- Execute an AV national strategy and issue updated guidance to foster the safe deployment of Automated Driving Systems (ADS) in the United States.
- Foster a unified national regulatory environment for AVs by eliminating legacy barriers and identifying outdated safety requirements.

[17] https://www.theavindustry.org/press-release/avia-releases-2025-state-of-av

[18] This report considers Automated Vehicles to be motor vehicles equipped with Automated Driving Systems (ADS), as defined in SAE Standard J3016_202104 - Taxonomy and Definitions for Terms Related to Driving Automation Systems for On-Road Motor Vehicles.

# Conclusion

Through implementation of the NRSS and the pursuit of safer people, safer roads, and safer vehicles, as outlined in this document, DOT will continue to reduce roadway fatalities and serious injuries. The corresponding NRSS key activities highlight steps the Department intends to take by December 2028. The Department will continue to engage with the transportation community in these activities and other efforts, toward a shared goal of making significant improvements in roadway safety across the transportation system to save lives.

The Department believes that every journey should end safely and that the Golden Age of Transportation is, first and foremost, safe.