

Critical Issues in Policing

The Current State of Traffic Enforcement



2025



POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM

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Traffic Enforcement

November 2025



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A Message from Executive Director Chuck Wexler



When the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a screeching halt in early 2020, businesses closed and people stayed home—yet traffic fatalities in the U.S. skyrocketed.¹ Meanwhile, in European Union nations, fewer cars on the road resulted in fewer crashes and less serious injuries.² Why did this discrepancy occur? Did U.S. police agencies change their enforcement practices during this time, and did those changes affect traffic fatalities? Or did other phenomena affect road safety?

At the beginning of the pandemic, many agencies reduced traffic enforcement because of increased fears about person-to-person contact during vehicle stops. Almost simultaneously—following the murder of George Floyd in late May 2020—communities nationwide protested police policies and practices and called for a “reimagining” of the policing profession. The notion that traffic stops have few or no safety benefits—and may even cause more harm than not conducting them at all—gained widespread attention. Traffic stops became flashpoints for conflict between police officers and motorists, and social media made these contentious interactions available for everyone to see and discuss. Public sentiment toward law enforcement was challenged, and many officers resigned or retired.³

1. NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), “National Statistics,” FARS (Fatality Analysis Reporting System), U.S. Department of Transportation, accessed July 23, 2025, <https://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/Main/index.aspx>; NHTSA, “Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities for the First Half (January–June) of 2025,” Traffic Safety Facts (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, 2025), <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813756>.
2. ERSO (European Road Safety Observatory), “Data Table — Number of Road Deaths and Rate Per Million Population, EU and EFTA Countries, 2010–2023,” last modified April 10, 2025, https://road-safety.transport.ec.europa.eu/european-road-safety-observatory_en; Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, “EU Road Fatalities Drop by 3% in 2024, But Progress Remains Slow,” last modified March 18, 2025, https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/eu-road-fatalities-drop-3-2024-progress-remains-slow-2025-03-18_en.
3. PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), “PERF Survey Shows Police Staffing Increased Slightly in 2024 but Still Lower Than 2019,” last modified July 5, 2025, <https://www.policeforum.org/trending5jul25>.

These two events—the pandemic and the period of social unrest after George Floyd’s murder—significantly transformed traffic enforcement practices.

Whether as a matter of public health policy or as a response to a perceived lack of public support, many officers nationwide reduced the number of traffic stops they conducted and citations they issued. This decrease in traffic enforcement coincided with an increase in traffic fatalities. Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, showed nearly 4,000 more traffic deaths in 2021 than in 2020, totaling almost 7,000 more fatalities than in 2019 before the pandemic—a 24.3 percent increase in fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled.⁴ Of course, other factors likely played a role in the increase in traffic fatalities. Emptier roads may have led more drivers to speed, regardless of any changes in enforcement; smartphones and other in-car technologies are a major distraction for drivers and pedestrians alike; and impaired driving from alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs remains a serious public health problem,⁵ with an increasing number of drivers involved in fatal crashes testing positive for poly-drug use.⁶

Amid the rising fatalities and staffing shortages, law enforcement agencies began devising new approaches to ensure traffic safety. Peter Simshauser, chief counsel of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), said that the administration is “working to identify specific, targeted initiatives that we can take to lower the persistent number of road fatalities that the country continues to experience.” One such initiative, according to Simshauser, is “implement[ing] measures to reduce distraction[s] for drivers and pedestrians in a way that can have a meaningful impact on pedestrian fatalities.” This initiative represents critical support from the federal government, as distracted driving is among the primary causes of vehicle crashes⁷ and pedestrian fatalities are at or near an all-time high.⁸

But as PERF has previously reported,⁹ policing continues to face significant staffing challenges, limiting departments’ ability to respond to increased traffic safety concerns as they once could. Police chiefs and sheriffs often tell me that their ability to assign additional personnel to traffic enforcement in high-crash areas or to locations with a high number of community complaints for unsafe driving is long gone. Because of these staffing limitations, I wondered if departments should increasingly rely on technology to maintain road safety, and to what degree they think technology is as effective as police officers at changing drivers’ unsafe habits.

4. NHTSA, “Early Estimate” (see note 1).

5. NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board), “NTSB Report Finds Alcohol and Cannabis Are Primary Drugs Detected in Impaired Drivers,” press release, January 12, 2023, <https://www.nts.gov/news/press-releases/Pages/NR20230112.aspx>; Matthew G. Myers, Erin E. Bonar, and Kipling M. Bohnert, “Driving Under the Influence of Cannabis, Alcohol, and Illicit Drugs Among Adults in the United States from 2016 to 2020,” *Science Direct* 140 (2023), 107614, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2023.107614>.

6. Sunday Azagba et al., “Positive Drug Test Trends in Fatally-Injured Drivers in the United States from 2007 to 2017,” *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 14, no. 43 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-019-0228-z>; Fernando A. Wilson, Jim P. Stimpson, and Jose A. Pagan, “Fatal Crashes from Drivers Testing Positive for Drugs in the U.S., 1993–2010,” *Public Health Report* 129, no. 4 (2014), 342–350, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24982537/>.

7. NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), “Distracted Driving,” U.S. Department of Transportation, accessed July 30, 2025, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>.

8. Highway Loss Data Institute, “Fatality Facts: Pedestrians,” Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, last modified July 2025, <https://www.iihs.org/research-areas/fatality-statistics/detail/pedestrians>.

9. PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), *Responding to the Staffing Crisis: Innovations in Recruitment and Retention*, Critical Issues in Policing Series (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2023), <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/RecruitmentRetention.pdf>.



With these questions in mind, PERF gathered more than 100 police supervisors and executives, as well as traffic safety officials and scholars, from across the United States and Canada for a day-long meeting to discuss their experiences with traffic enforcement since the onset of the pandemic. Held in March 2025 at the Center for Education at Wolf Trap¹⁰—a performing arts venue in Vienna, Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C.—the meeting revealed that the impacts of the pandemic and police protests on traffic safety were widespread and continue to be felt.

Meeting attendees emphasized the importance of reinforcing from the top down that proactive traffic enforcement is necessary to reduce traffic deaths and maintain public order. New technologies such as automated speed and red-light cameras can act as force multipliers, assisting in enforcement without requiring an officer to be physically present. And many jurisdictions have either formally or informally signed on to the Vision Zero campaign, a multidisciplinary approach to achieving the extraordinarily ambitious goal of “eliminat[ing] all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all” through a combination of enforcement, engineering, and education strategies.¹¹

We are also getting a glimpse of the future—cars without drivers. Autonomous vehicles (AV) are appearing in more cities all the time, exposing more people to an experience previously reserved for science fiction. In fact, shortly before our meeting in Virginia, I took my first ride in an AV: I was in Phoenix with several PERF staff members when we ordered a driverless car to take us from our hotel to the airport. Caught between amazement and terror, I sensed a revolution in transportation was on the horizon and wondered if the implications had been fully contemplated. Are AVs safe for a wide range of driving conditions? What are their risks? Will they change the rules of the road? Will travel times be affected? How should police agencies be prepared to respond? Can a police officer even issue a ticket to a car without a driver? This report considers these questions.

10. “About,” Wolf Trap, accessed July 29, 2025, <https://www.wolftrap.org/about.aspx>.

11. “What is Vision Zero?” Vision Zero Network, accessed July 17, 2025, <https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/>.

The report concludes with 10 practical recommendations that jurisdictions can adopt to improve their traffic enforcement efforts, enhance roadway safety, and develop strategies for emerging technologies. The recommendations include using data to identify crash hot spots, preparing for emerging technologies, collaborating with other government agencies to share responsibility for traffic safety, and fostering an organizational culture that prioritizes effective traffic enforcement.

Traffic safety is as much the responsibility of law enforcement agencies as policing crime and disorder. In fact, the reduction in traffic enforcement and increase in traffic fatalities that coincided with the pandemic and social unrest demonstrated just how important police are to community safety. In jurisdiction after jurisdiction, the data show that when police reduced the number of traffic stops they conducted and the number of citations they issued, the number of traffic crashes and the seriousness of those crashes increased. We know that correlation does not equal causation, but cities must look closely at their traffic crashes and develop strategies that will save lives.

Police chiefs and sheriffs must keep this in mind as they allocate scarce resources in an environment of competing demands. Repeatedly, we heard police leaders say the number of personnel assigned to traffic enforcement units has been cut because of the staffing crisis. Given the associated increase in traffic crashes—and the large number of community complaints related to traffic safety in police commanders' inboxes—they may need to reconsider this decision or, as many have already done, invest heavily in educating all police officers (not just personnel in specialized units) about the importance of traffic enforcement, where and why it should be done, and the actions they should take when interacting with motorists. **“Changing [motorists'] behavior is where the benefit over the next decade or two will come, and that's dependent on traffic enforcement,”** says traffic safety expert Dr. Jeffrey Michael of the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy. **“There isn't anything more effective than traffic enforcement to improve driver behavior.”**

But we need also to remember that taking enforcement action to improve road safety must be balanced with the awareness that car stops have been a flashpoint for conflict with motorists, all too often undercutting community trust. Indeed, we have learned that indiscriminate traffic enforcement can be as detrimental as not conducting any traffic enforcement at all. How can we strike the right balance of reducing traffic accidents and maintaining community trust? With staffing shortages a persistent challenge, how do we best allocate limited police resources and ensure officers are well-trained to make good decisions? And how do we leverage technology to help keep our roads safe without sacrificing the personal touch and judgment that come with interactions between a motorist and a police officer? These are the questions we should continually ask ourselves.

I hope you find this report helpful as you meet the many challenges of your positions, including traffic safety.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chuck Wexler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chuck" being more prominent than the last name "Wexler".

Chuck Wexler
Executive Director
Police Executive Research Forum
Washington, D.C.



Acknowledgments

This report came to fruition through extensive research, one-on-one interviews, and insights gained at our traffic enforcement meeting in Vienna, Virginia. We thank everyone who took the time to speak with PERF staff before the meeting, as well as the meeting attendees in Virginia for sharing their experiences (see appendix). Their perspectives brought clarity to a complex topic.

This is the 55th report in PERF's *Critical Issues in Policing* series, a long-running project made possible by the generous and committed support of Motorola Solutions and the Motorola Solutions Foundation. PERF would like to thank Greg Brown, Motorola Solutions Chairman and CEO; Jack Molloy, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer; Jason Winkler, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer; John Zidar, Senior Vice President, North America Government; and Wesley Barden Touhy, Executive Director, Motorola Solutions Foundation.

Like all PERF projects, this was a team effort. Senior Principal Martin Bartness led the project and authored the report. Senior Principal Dave McClure coordinated logistics and background research for the meeting. Senior Research Assistant Caleb Regen assisted with meeting logistics, conducted background interviews, and drafted sections of the report. Director Tom Wilson and Deputy Director Jennifer Sommers provided project guidance. Senior Communications Principal James McGinty assisted with meeting logistics and reviewed the report. Communications Associate Dustin Waters designed the report layout. And Editor Melissa Fox edited the report.

Executive Summary

Every year in the United States, tens of thousands of people die in motor vehicle crashes, making it the third leading cause of preventable injury-related death after poisonings (including drug overdoses) and falls among Americans.¹² In 2020, despite a 17-year low in vehicle miles traveled, traffic fatalities increased by 7 percent compared to the previous year. Motor vehicle deaths increased again in 2021, this time by 11 percent. Although they have since decreased, they have not yet returned to their 2019 levels, significantly affecting the country's progress on road safety since the mid-1990s (see table 1).

Table 1. Traffic fatalities fell by every measure between 1994 and 2019

Measurement	1994	2019	Change in percentage
Fatalities per 100,000 licensed drivers	23.21	15.88	-31.58
Fatalities per 100,000 registered vehicles	21.15	12.15	-42.55
Fatalities per 100,000 population	15.64	11.07	-29.22
Fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled	1.73	1.11	-35.84
Absolute number of motor vehicle fatalities	40,716	36,355	-10.71
Absolute number of motor vehicle crashes	36,254	33,487	-7.63

Source: NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), "National Statistics," U.S. Department of Transportation, accessed September 16, 2025, <https://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/Main/index.aspx>.

12. "Top 10 Preventable Injuries," National Safety Council, accessed October 27, 2025, <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/all-injuries/deaths-by-demographics/top-10-preventable-injuries/>.

To explore the potential causes of the sudden surge in traffic crashes and fatalities, PERF convened a national meeting of subject matter experts in Vienna, Virginia, in March 2025. Representatives from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy, National Policing Institute, Institute for Intergovernmental Research, and more than 50 police departments and other organizations convened to discuss the steps agencies can take—especially given limited resources—to improve road safety and respond to their communities’ traffic concerns. This report presents the major themes of those discussions.

One explanation for the increase in motor vehicle crashes in 2020 is the onset of the **COVID-19 pandemic in March**. That event sent people indoors, causing a reduction in vehicle miles traveled; possibly, those motorists who continued to use the roadways felt emboldened to drive faster, more recklessly, or otherwise take greater risks. At the same time, there was a **decrease in traffic enforcement**. Although police couldn’t simply stay home and isolate to avoid the coronavirus, many jurisdictions adopted policies to reduce officers’ close-contact enforcement activities in favor of maintaining distance to limit the virus’s spread.

The widespread social unrest that occurred in many communities during the summer of 2020, after the killing of George Floyd, also led to a decline in traffic enforcement and other proactive police work. Calls for police reform and widespread anti-law enforcement sentiment emerged at a time when anxiety among police and civilians alike was already high several months into a once-in-a-generation pandemic. Officers’ frustration with negative public sentiment resulted in more retirements and resignations, as well as difficulties in recruiting new officers, all of which contributed to staffing shortages.¹³ As a result, chiefs and sheriffs faced tough choices about reducing discretionary enforcement and downsizing specialized units, including those responsible for traffic safety.

Distractions like smartphones and impairments such as alcohol and drugs also contributed to crashes and rising fatalities. With in-car technology making it easier to stay connected to the internet, and more states legalizing marijuana, it is not surprising that these factors, combined with the higher speeds and less enforcement already discussed, are associated with an increase in fatal crashes.

The first section of this report examines **National Crash Data** in detail, including pedestrian and bystander fatalities, and compares U.S. and European fatal crash rates. The second section considers the question raised here—**Why Did Traffic Fatalities Increase?**—and drills down into each of the possible reasons already mentioned. Thereafter, each section examines the complexities of traffic enforcement and makes recommendations for improving how it is carried out:

- In **Using Data to Inform Decision-Making**, the report highlights the importance of police and communities collaborating to identify where and what kind of traffic enforcement is needed, based on evidence from crash data and traffic studies as well as residents’ input. The report also emphasizes the need to publicly share the data used to make deployment decisions and the results of enforcement actions taken to improve traffic safety.

13. PERF, “PERF Survey Shows Police Staffing Increased Slightly in 2024 but Still Lower Than 2019,” July 5, 2025, <https://www.policeforum.org/trending5jul25>; PERF, “New PERF Survey Shows Police Agencies Have Turned a Corner with Staffing Challenges,” April 27, 2024, <https://www.policeforum.org/staffing2024>.

- Many jurisdictions are instituting **Vision Zero** strategies, which combine public education, civic engineering, and law enforcement efforts, to achieve the ambitious goal of reducing traffic fatalities and crashes with serious injuries to zero. Common Vision Zero strategies include educating people to use the roadways safely (for example, with electronic message boards and public awareness campaigns on social media); engineering the roadways so that even when people misuse them, injuries are less likely to result (for example, with traffic calming measures and separated bike lanes); and focusing enforcement on motorists who pose a danger to others by speeding, running red lights, and driving recklessly as opposed to motorists with vehicles in need of equipment repairs (especially in areas where greater numbers of crashes occur).
- The social upheaval of the summer of 2020 cast a spotlight on the need for police to **balance the enforcement of traffic laws with maintaining public trust**. Taking enforcement action to improve road safety must be balanced with the awareness that car stops have been a flashpoint for conflict with motorists, all too often undercutting community trust. Indeed, we have learned that indiscriminate traffic enforcement can be as detrimental as not conducting any traffic enforcement at all. Police officers must therefore use their discretion wisely, remembering that every traffic stop is an opportunity to impact community confidence and trust in a positive way by applying the principles of procedural justice.
- Many locales are now using **Automated Traffic Enforcement and Artificial Intelligence** to improve road safety. Speed cameras and red-light cameras, for example, are a strong deterrent to unsafe driving behavior, as they scan a high volume of traffic and issue citations without risking officer safety. This section of the report examines how jurisdictions are using cameras to enhance road safety and introduces emerging technologies designed to prevent impaired driving, speeding, and reckless driving.
- Given the profession's staffing shortages, **Overcoming Internal Challenges** is of particular importance; more officers need to be generalists rather than specialists, with everyone embracing traffic enforcement as a core responsibility of their public safety duties. This requires chiefs and sheriffs to create an organizational culture that values traffic safety and provides officers with the necessary knowledge and skills to conduct traffic enforcement safely and effectively.
- Self-driving cars, also known as **Autonomous Vehicles**, are working as taxis in several cities and expanding to more all the time. An emerging issue for policing, autonomous vehicles present different challenges to police departments than human-operated cars, and it's important that jurisdictions are prepared to respond when autonomous vehicles arrive. This section of the report outlines several actions that law enforcement and allied agencies can take before companies begin operating in a new city.
- Police agencies must also be ready for **Street Takeovers** or vehicle sideshows, which have become a pervasive problem nationwide. This report discusses the various strategies and tactics that jurisdictions are using to break up or prevent the disorder and danger that street takeovers bring to participants, spectators, and innocent road users.

The report concludes with the following 10 Recommendations to Promote Traffic Safety:

1. Analyze data to identify crash hot spots and deploy enforcement resources.
2. Educate the community about the purpose of traffic enforcement.
3. Research and implement automated traffic enforcement technology.
4. Identify lessons learned when preparing for the deployment of autonomous vehicles.
5. Partner with other agencies to implement Vision Zero strategies.
6. Develop a comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to street takeovers.
7. Consider the role professional staff can play in traffic enforcement.
8. Create an organizational culture that values and prioritizes traffic safety.
9. Invest in impairment detection technology.
10. Balance traffic safety with community trust.

These recommendations summarize the contributions from meeting participants and distill them into concrete actions that agencies can take. Departments of all sizes and in all types of settings and circumstances, even those facing staffing shortages, can use these recommendations to make real progress toward ensuring traffic enforcement, traffic safety, and community trust are priorities.





National Crash Data

National data published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) show what many police leaders have experienced in their jurisdictions: The number of traffic deaths rose at the beginning of the COVID outbreak in 2020 and has still, in 2025, not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Data NHTSA provided to the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) show that between 2013 and 2019, traffic fatalities steadily increased by 11 percent, from 32,893 to 36,355.¹⁴ Once COVID arrived, that number spiked to more than 39,000 and continued to increase to more than 43,000 fatalities before beginning to recede in 2022 (see figure 1 on page 3).¹⁵ Deaths per 100 million vehicle miles driven similarly waxed and waned between 2019 and 2023 (see figure 2 on page 3).¹⁶ Early estimates of 2024 and 2025 data suggest this downward trend continues, but figures remain above 2013 levels.¹⁷

High rate of pedestrian fatalities

Richard Retting of the National Academies Transportation Research Board, who has studied roadway safety for more than 40 years, identified the increase in pedestrian fatalities as the most notable trend of his career. Citing 2021 as the “highest year in recent memory for pedestrian fatalities,” he attributed the growth of smartphone use as a primary contributor. “The problem with smartphones is the visual distraction,” says Retting. “And I believe it’s not only pedestrians themselves that are distracted, but drivers who look down for even five seconds. The pedestrians on the side of the road are just so much more vulnerable to serious injury.”

14. NHTSA, “Early Estimate” (see note 1).

15. NHTSA, “Early Estimate” (see note 1).

16. “Car Crash Deaths and Rates,” National Safety Council, accessed July 23, 2025, <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/motor-vehicle/historical-fatality-trends/deaths-and-rates/>.

17. NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), “NHTSA Announces Traffic Fatalities Decreased in the First Quarter of 2025,” press release, July 10, 2025, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/traffic-fatalities-decreased-first-quarter-2025>.

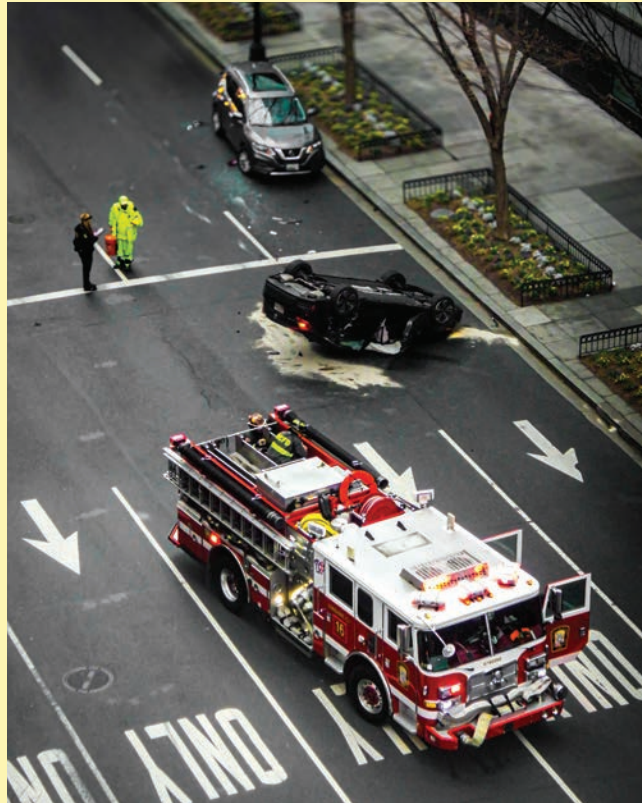
Risk factors for crash fatalities

Trailing only poisoning and falls, motor vehicle crashes are the third-highest cause of death by unintentional injury in the United States.* According to the National Safety Council, crash fatalities were responsible for 44,762 deaths in the United States in 2023 and the “leading cause of preventable death for every age from 5 to 22[, and the] second leading cause of preventable death for every age from 23 to 67.”†

According to Richard Retting, Senior Program Officer at the National Academies Transportation Research Board and an auxiliary police officer with the Fairfax County (Virginia) Police Department, “Total crashes are largely associated with traffic volume, whereas fatalities have risk factors. I think it’s interesting to note that we have about the same number of fatal crashes during the day and at night, but there are far more vehicles on the road during the day. So, on a rate basis, the risk of fatal crashes is far higher at night. And we’ve seen in the most recent two years of data that nighttime crashes are increasing at a faster rate than daytime crashes.

“In terms of land use, there’s been a 33 percent downward trend in rural crashes in the past 20 years, but a 52 percent increase in urban crashes. For police chiefs in urban environments, this provides more evidence of the need for traffic enforcement in those areas.

“And there’s been a bigger drop in occupant fatalities than anything else. A lot of the reason for that is advancements in crash avoidance technology and the ability to protect people in crashes through occupant protection. But that’s not the case for people who don’t [use or] benefit from those features.”

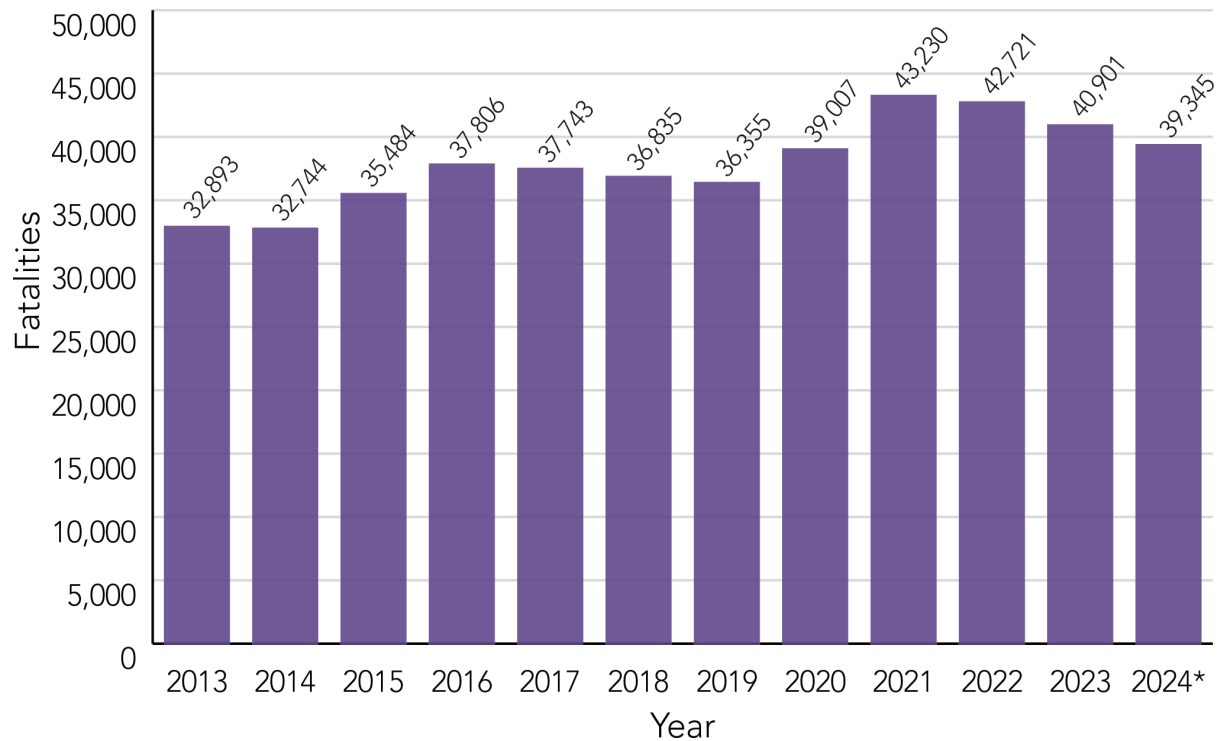


* National Safety Council, “The Six Leading Causes of Death Caused by Unintentional Injury in 2023,” accessed July 15, 2025, <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/all-injuries/deaths-by-demographics/deaths-by-age/data-details/>.

† National Safety Council, “The Six Leading Causes of Death.”

Several of PERF’s meeting attendees affirmed Retting’s research. Commander Nicole Jones of the San Francisco Police Department’s Traffic Division and Sergeant Patrick Windus of the Minneapolis Police Department’s Traffic Investigation Unit both said about half of their traffic fatalities involve pedestrians. These rates may be lower in less urban areas, but nonmotorists (pedestrians, cyclists, and others neither driving nor riding in a motor vehicle) consistently represent approximately one in five traffic fatalities (see figure 3 on page 4).

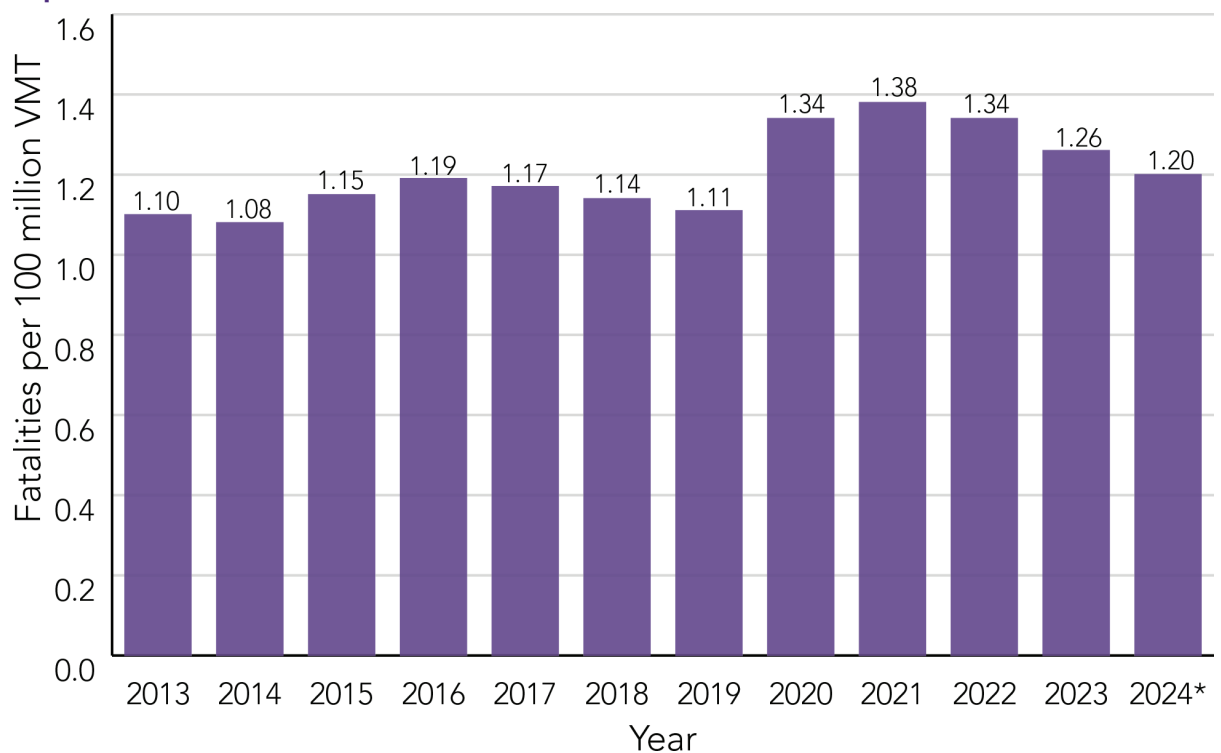
Figure 1. U.S. traffic fatalities spiked at the onset of COVID, peaked in 2021, and remain well above 2013 figures despite a recent decline



* 2024 data are estimates and have not yet been finalized.

Source: NHTSA, "National Statistics" (see note 1); NHTSA, "Early Estimate" (see note 1).

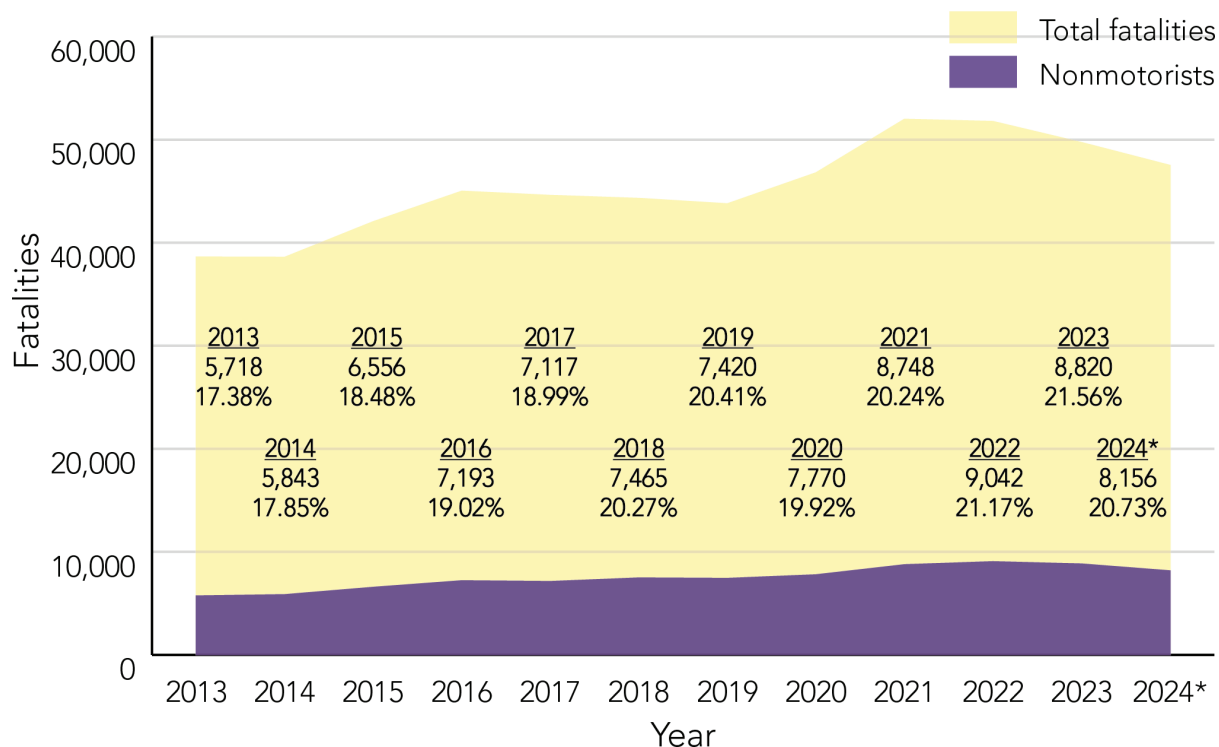
Figure 2. U.S. traffic fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled also rose sharply in the pandemic but have almost returned to 2013 levels



* 2024 data are estimates and have not yet been finalized.

Source: NHTSA, "National Statistics" (see note 1); NHTSA, "Early Estimate" (see note 1).

Figure 3. Nonmotorists as a percentage of all traffic fatalities, 2013–2024



* 2024 data are estimates and have not yet been finalized.

Source: NHTSA, “Early Estimates of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities and Fatality Rate by Sub-Categories in 2024,” Traffic Safety Facts (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, 2025), <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813729>; NHTSA, “National Statistics” (see note 1); NHTSA, “Early Estimate” (see note 1).

Comparison to other nations

Fatal crash data from the European Union (EU) do not mirror fatal crash trends in the United States. Whereas traffic fatalities in the EU declined during the first months of the COVID pandemic, U.S. traffic fatalities increased (see figure 4 on page 5). In fact, according to Dr. Jeffrey Michael of the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy, while traffic fatalities increased by 17 percent in the United States during the first part of the COVID pandemic, traffic fatalities in EU countries “about the size of the U.S.” decreased by 13 percent in the same period.

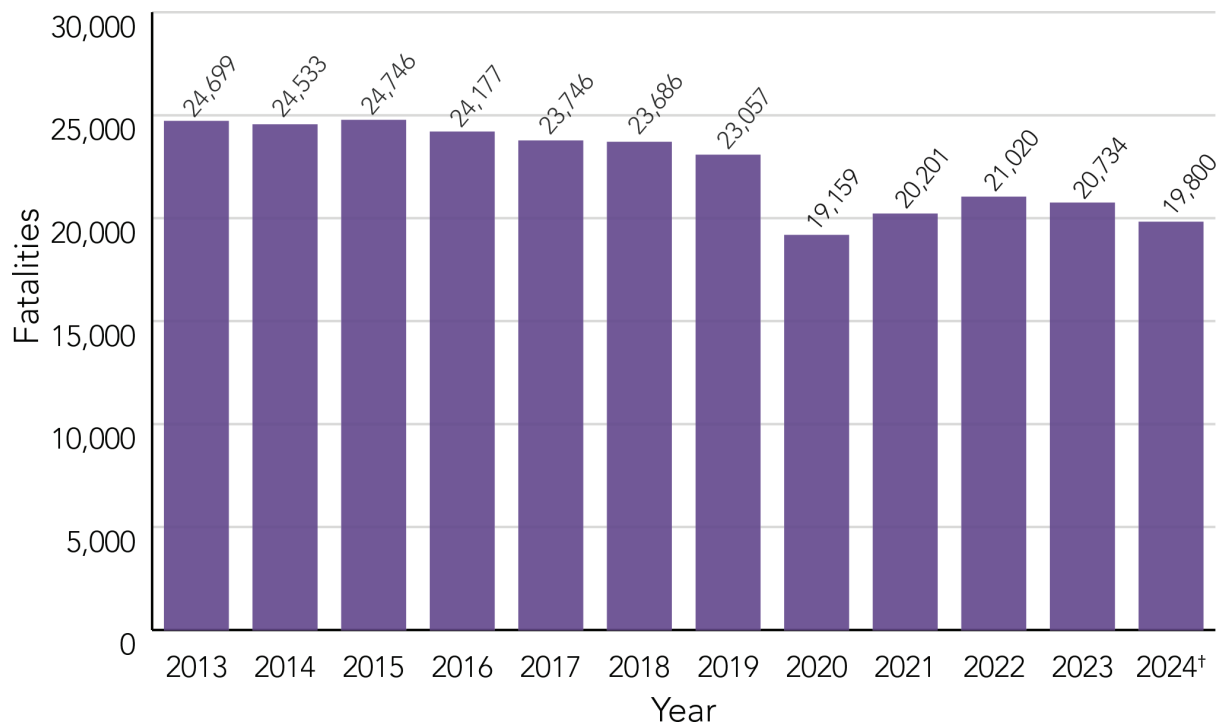
Former British diplomat and international police consultant Robert Peirce, who co-authored *Seven Ways to Fix Policing NOW* with retired Seattle Police Chief Kathleen O’Toole, characterized the fatal crash statistics in the United States as *frightening*. “They are far higher than the countries the U.S. would normally wish to be compared with,” Peirce said. “Countries like the United Kingdom and Germany have roughly one-quarter of the rate of accidents per vehicle miles.” When asked to explain the disparity, Peirce suggested the United States look to these other countries for an explanation.

Why are there so many more traffic fatalities in the United States than in Europe?

I don't know how to explain it. I was talking to someone who said it's the greater risk mentality in this country, which may have something to do with it. But whenever I go to the UK, I'm struck by the speed that people are driving there on quite congested roads. It's not that people aren't driving fast [in the UK], and in Germany they're driving even faster. So, I think it might be instructive to look at whatever they're doing in the UK and Germany to keep the accident level much lower than it is here.

— Robert Peirce, former British diplomat and international police consultant

Figure 4. Whereas U.S. traffic fatalities increased during COVID, they decreased in European Union (EU) and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries*



* The EU includes Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden; the EFTA includes Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

† 2024 data are estimates and have not yet been finalized.

Source: ERSO, "Data Table — Number of Road Deaths and Rate Per Million Population" (see note 2); Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, "EU Road Fatalities Drop" (see note 2).



Why Did Traffic Fatalities Increase?



COVID

While there is no definitive answer for the dramatic increase in U.S. traffic fatalities and injuries, researchers consistently point to two co-occurring phenomena during the height of the COVID pandemic: Police officers conducted significantly less traffic enforcement, and motorists engaged in riskier behaviors and did so more often.

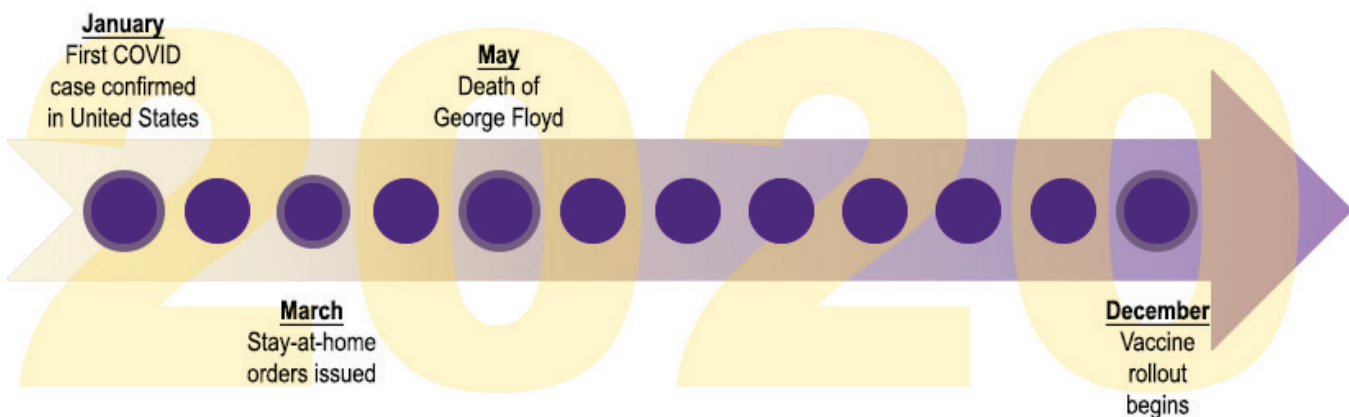
Keith Williams of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) called COVID “a turning point in traffic casualties” in the United States. “COVID-19 revealed a lot of unique patterns concerning traffic safety when compared to previous times when there was economic downturn,” he said. “Historically, when there were less people on the road, less people taking trips, and less people engaging in risky driving behaviors, those downturns resulted in diminished amounts of traffic fatalities.”

For reasons researchers are still trying to fully understand, the opposite occurred this time around: As fewer people took to the roads, traffic fatalities increased. Part of the explanation could be related to the directives police executives gave their officers. A 2020 survey of approximately 5,800 law enforcement agencies conducted by George Mason University found that “by March 23 [, 2020], 62 percent of responding agencies had already adopted formal policies asking officers to reduce or limit proactive enforcement behaviors”¹⁸ Given the directives of public health officials to avoid contact and maintain distance, it can be reasonably assumed that other law enforcement agencies augmented these formal policies with informal directives to reduce or limit proactive enforcement.

18. Cynthia Lum, Carl Maupin, and Megan Stoltz, “The Supply and Demand Shifts in Policing at the Start of the Pandemic: A National Multi-Wave Survey of the Impacts of COVID-19 on American Law Enforcement,” *Police Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/10986111221148217>.

Protests against the police

At the same time public health officials were telling people to maintain social distance, mass protests calling for widespread police reform took center stage following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. These protests—a quasi-referendum on the role of law enforcement in public safety—challenged long-standing police practices ranging from use of force policy to crisis response and from community oversight to qualified immunity. Some community members even advocated for legislation to restrict the types of offenses that allow police to stop drivers, proposing that non-moving violations—like not wearing a seat belt, equipment defects, or expired registration—should no longer be sufficient grounds for a stop. According to a Gallup poll, only 48 percent of Americans said they had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in police in 2020—the first time since 1994 that this number dipped below 50 percent.(see figure 5 on page 9).¹⁹



Timeline of 2020 events.

It is well-documented how these protests, calls for reform, and criticism of police officers are associated with police officers taking less proactive enforcement action. A study examining the impact of de-policing during this time found “a discontinuous and persistent drop in officer contact with civilians . . . [that] is durable and holds across all contexts.”²⁰

But it wasn’t just public sentiment that kept police officers from enforcing traffic laws. The protests themselves were a tremendous demand on police resources, requiring a large police presence to maintain public order and protect protesters’ First Amendment rights. In the first week of protests alone, the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department spent \$2.3 million on overtime, the Miami Police Department spent about \$1.8 million, and the Dallas Police Department spent \$1.5 million.²¹ And although protests in some cities lasted only a few days, in others they endured for weeks—sometimes even months. Portland, Oregon, for example,

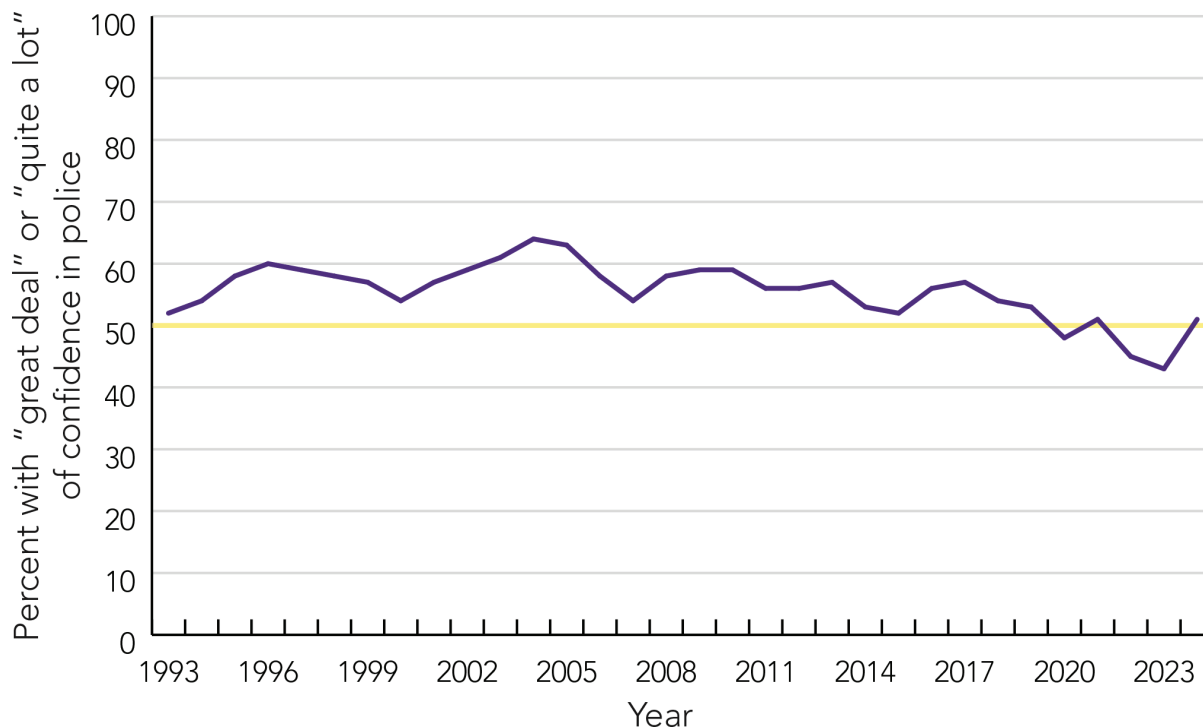
19. Megan Brenan, “U.S. Confidence in Institutions Mostly Flat, but Police Up,” Gallup, last modified July 15, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/647303/confidence-institutions-mostly-flat-police.aspx>.

20. Marcel Roman et al., “The George Floyd Effect: How Protests and Public Scrutiny Changed Police Behavior,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2025, 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592725000052>.

21. Stef W. Knight and Dan Primack, “The Budget Strain of the George Floyd Protests,” Axios, last modified June 18, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/2020/06/18/george-floyd-protest-cost-police-cities>.

experienced more than 170 days of protests in 2020.²² These protracted protests required officers to work long shifts, day after day, and undoubtedly impacted their desire and ability to conduct traffic enforcement.

Figure 5. For the first time in 30 years (1994–2024), the percentage of Americans with “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the police dipped below 50 percent in 2020



Source: Brennan, “U.S. Confidence in Institutions” (see note 19).

Decrease in traffic enforcement

A possible explanation for the disparate trajectory of traffic fatalities during an economic recession and a public health pandemic is the number of traffic stops conducted. Because COVID is spread through human contact, police officers—like the rest of the population—were told to limit unnecessary interactions with others. Cities across the country saw a marked decrease in the number of traffic stops conducted after the beginning of the COVID outbreak.

In Baltimore, New Orleans, and San Francisco, for example, police made less than half as many traffic stops in 2023 as they had made in 2018, according to the *New York Times* (see figure 6 on page 11).²³ Of course, other factors likely played a role in the increase in traffic fatalities. Emptier roads may have led more drivers to speed, regardless of any changes in enforcement; smartphones and other in-car technologies are a major distraction for drivers and pedestrians alike; and impaired driving from alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs remains

22. Natalie Fertig, “‘I Just Had Flashbacks’: Portland Looks to Avoid Repeat of 2020 Protests,” *Politico*, last modified June 14, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/06/14/portland-los-angeles-protests-trump-00406242>.

23. Emily Badger and Ben Blatt, “Traffic Enforcement Dwindled in the Pandemic. In Many Places, It Hasn’t Come Back,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/07/29/upshot/traffic-enforcement-dwindled.html>.

a serious public health problem,²⁴ with an increasing number of drivers involved in fatal crashes testing positive for drugs and poly-drug use becoming more common.²⁵

Similar to the decrease in the number of traffic stops made, the number of traffic citations police officers issued dropped dramatically: by 34 percent in Memphis, 35 percent in Buffalo, 37 percent in New York City, and 83 percent in Seattle.²⁶ And it wasn't just major cities that saw this decrease in traffic citations; in Monroe County, New York, the same downward trajectory of traffic stops occurred: In 2018, deputies conducted more than 33,000 stops and issued tickets in 78 percent of them, while in 2020 and 2021 combined they conducted only two-thirds as many stops and issued tickets in just 67 percent. By 2023, the number of stops had begun to rebound, but the percentage of those stops leading to citations was still lower than 70 percent (see figure 7 on page 12).²⁷



As a result of these decreases in traffic stops and citations, the certainty of being pulled over for committing traffic violations fell during the first part of the COVID pandemic, which created the perception among motorists of a lack of consequences for committing traffic violations—and likely influenced social norms of acceptable driving behaviors. Then, by the first half of 2021, trip-taking was rebounding (see figure 8 on page 14). The congestion started building again, but there was no corresponding decrease in risky driving behaviors.

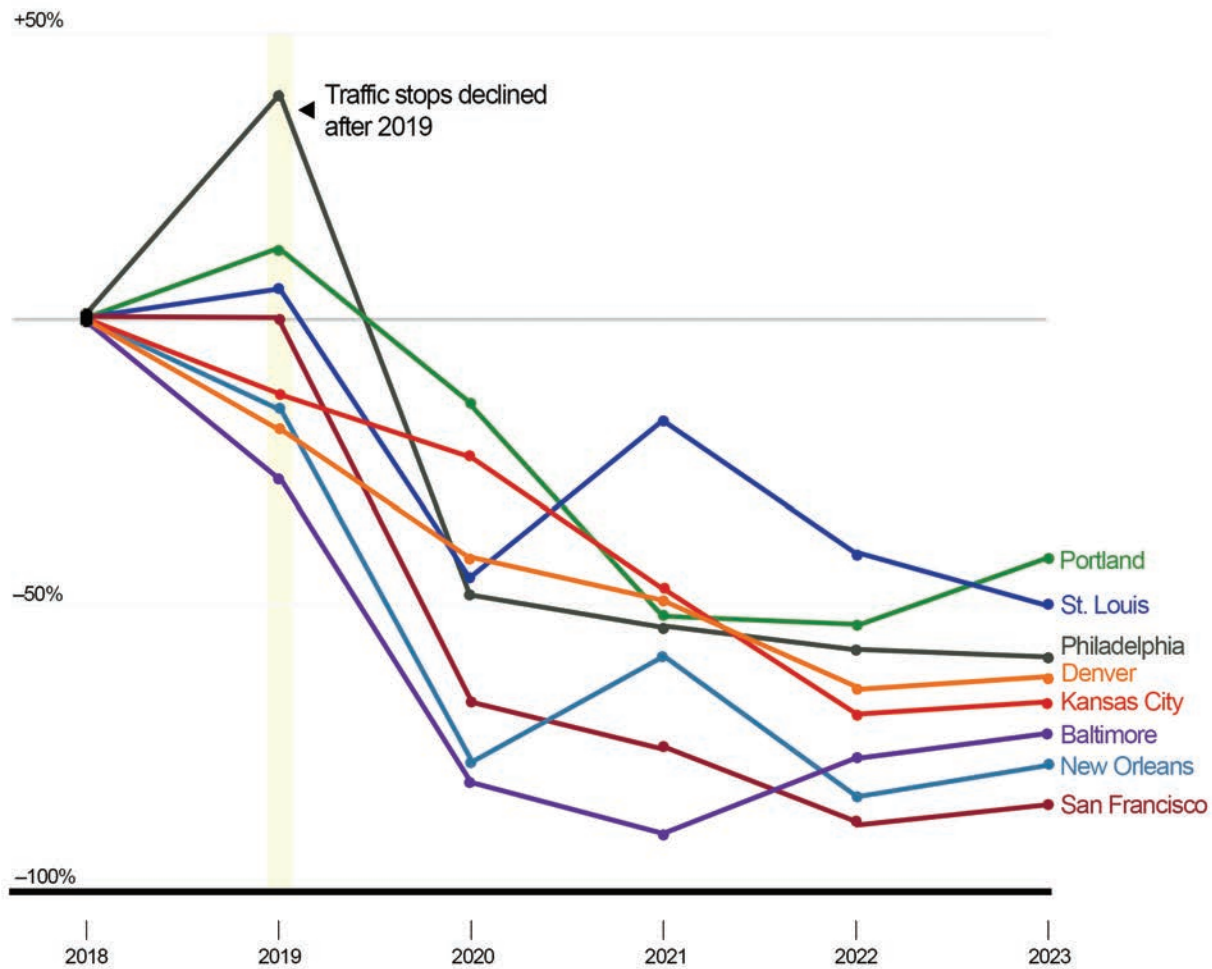
Staffing shortages

A May 3, 2025, article published in *American Police Beat* chronicled the staffing shortages that have plagued police departments throughout the United States since at least 2019:

“San Francisco and Phoenix are seeing shortages of more than 400 officers in each jurisdiction. Chicago is short well over 1,300, Los Angeles over 1,000, Washington almost 500, Houston nearly 100, Philadelphia about 1,200. In New York City, the shortages in the nation’s largest police force add up to over 3,000.”²⁸

24. NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board), “NTSB Report Finds Alcohol and Cannabis Are Primary Drugs Detected in Impaired Drivers,” press release, January 12, 2023, <https://www.nts.gov/news/press-releases/Pages/NR20230112.aspx/>; Matthew G. Myers, Erin E. Bonar, and Kipling M. Bohnert, “Driving Under the Influence of Cannabis, Alcohol, and Illicit Drugs Among Adults in the United States from 2016 to 2020,” *Science Direct* 140 (2023), 107614, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2023.107614>.
25. Sunday Azagba et al., “Positive Drug Test Trends in Fatally-Injured Drivers in the United States from 2007 to 2017,” *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 14, no. 43 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-019-0228-z>; Fernando A. Wilson, Jim P. Stimpson, and Jose A. Pagan, “Fatal Crashes from Drivers Testing Positive for Drugs in the U.S., 1993–2010,” *Public Health Report* 129, no. 4 (2014), 342–350, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24982537/>.
26. Badger and Blatt, “Traffic Enforcement Dwindled” (see note 23).
27. Beth Adams, “Police are Making Fewer Traffic Stops, But People Think Reckless Driving is On the Rise,” WXXI News, last modified November 11, 2024, <https://www.wxxinews.org/local-news/2024-11-11/police-are-making-fewer-traffic-stops-but-people-think-reckless-driving-is-on-the-rise>.
28. Gere Ira Katz, “Insufficient Police Staffing Continues Throughout the U.S.,” May 3, 2025, *American Police Beat*, <https://apbweb.com/2025/05/insufficient-police-staffing-continues-throughout-the-u-s/>.

Figure 6. Change in traffic stop volume in major cities, 2018–2023



Source: Adapted from Badger and Blatt, “Traffic Enforcement Dwindled” (see note 23).

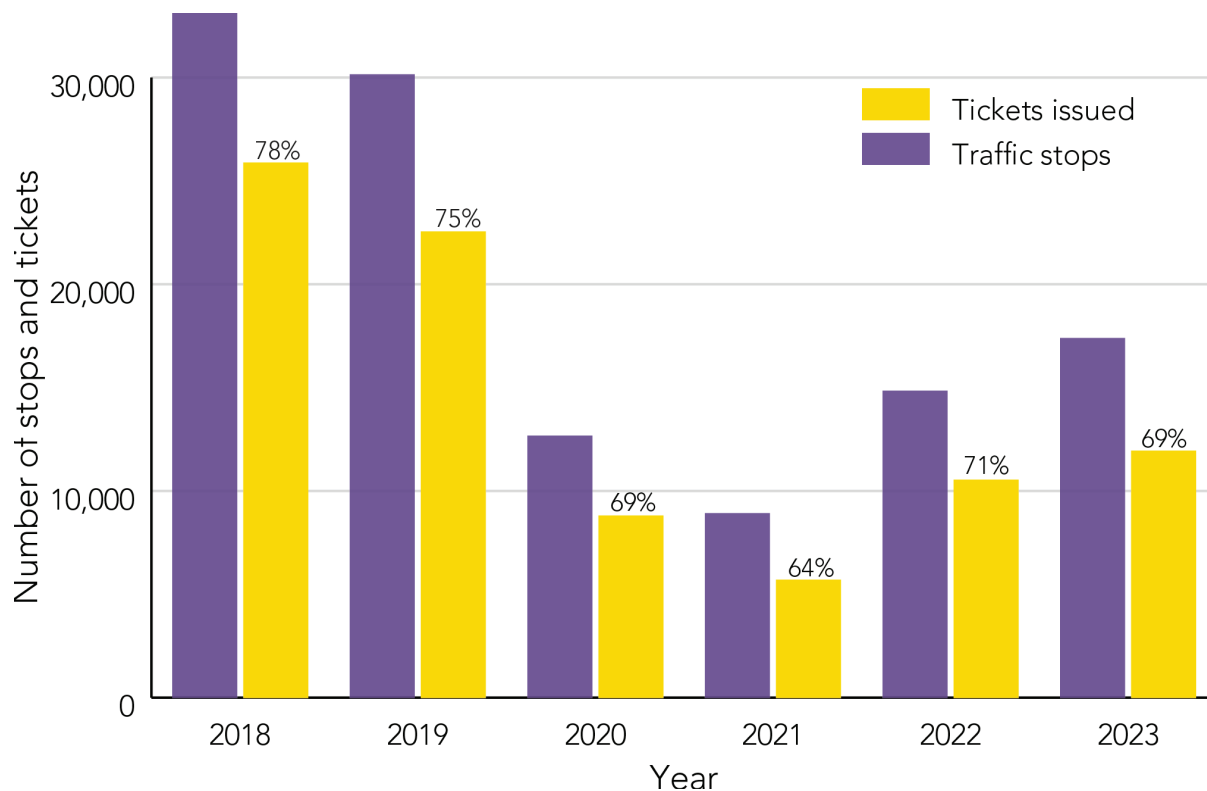


A perfect storm for traffic fatalities?

Despite stay-at-home orders, we saw this cohort of people that were risk tolerant and went out on the road. And a lot of agencies put out official policies directing officers not to do traffic stops because of the public health threat. And people were dying [of COVID] at that time, so traffic enforcement stopped.

— Keith Williams,
Division Chief, NHTSA

Figure 7. Fewer stops. Even fewer tickets (Monroe County Sheriff's Office)



Source: Brian Sharp, using data from Monroe County (New York) Sheriff's Office, in Beth Adams, "Police Are Making Fewer Traffic Stops" (see note 26).

PERF has reported extensively on how these shortages have challenged the policing profession—through creative and austere management practices—to perform its essential functions with fewer resources.²⁹ In publications like *Responding to the Staffing Crisis: Innovations in Recruitment and Retention*³⁰ and *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It*,³¹ PERF has called attention to the difficult decisions chiefs and sheriffs are frequently compelled to make about whether to downsize or disband specialized units to staff higher priority patrol squads and detective units.

Commander Nicole Jones of the San Francisco Police Department described how the department's staffing shortage has stretched her leadership of the Traffic Division:

"Our agency is several hundred officers short of where we should be right now, so we're not getting the resources in the Traffic Division. This requires my team to be more strategic and data-driven about the enforcement we do. But the staffing shortage is also impacting our district stations: Officers are spending

29. PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), "PERF Survey Shows Police Staffing Increased Slightly in 2024 but Still Lower Than 2019," last modified July 5, 2025, <https://www.policeforum.org/trending5jul25>; PERF, "The Staffing Crisis Has Agencies Taking Another Look at Civilianization," last modified June 8, 2024, <https://www.policeforum.org/trending8jun24>; PERF, "New PERF Survey Shows Police Agencies Have Turned a Corner with Staffing Challenges," last modified April 27, 2024, <https://www.policeforum.org/staffing2024>.

30. PERF, *Responding to the Staffing Crisis* (see note 9).

31. PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2019), <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>.

their time handling more calls for service, going from call to call to call, and there's not a lot of free time to do traffic enforcement through the course of their duties in any given day."

Captain Tim Schultz of the Anne Arundel County (Maryland) Police Department had a similar outlook:

"We're down 20 to 30 percent and we are absolutely in a staffing crisis, and our response to that is a reduction in all specialty units across the entire agency. Most of them have been wiped out. There's one traffic officer in each of our four districts. There is a reduction in nearly all our special operations, in our traffic enforcement unit, our speed enforcement unit, a massive reduction in those that are available to do speed enforcement."

And Captain Steven Edwards of the Overland Park (Kansas) Police Department said, "We've had to put a lot of special unit officers back in patrol. At one time I had 14 officer positions and two sergeants in my unit, and then I had one. But we've started to go back up, so now I have three."

Impairment

In addition to motorists' high rates of speed and distracted driving and pedestrians' crossing of roadways at locations and times of heightened risk, alcohol has been linked to more than 35,000 traffic fatalities per year since 2015 (see figure 9 on page 14). Alcohol is also a major factor in pedestrian fatalities. In fact, according to Richard Retting of the National Academies Transportation Research Board, "All crashes typically have multiple causes and contributing factors, but about half of pedestrian deaths involve alcohol."

Alcohol and other substances

Historically, law enforcement has focused significant traffic enforcement efforts on alcohol impairment. However, as regulations on cannabis use change (currently, 24 states and the District of Columbia allow recreational cannabis use)³² and impaired drivers are using drugs other than or in addition to alcohol, detecting drivers impaired by these other substances is essential. A study of people injured in car crashes and treated at seven level 1 trauma centers³³ between July 2019 and July 2021 showed **55 percent "of the injured or killed roadway users tested positive for one or more drugs (including alcohol) . . . [and 20 percent] of the road users tested positive for two or more categories of drugs."**³⁴

Roadside testing tools

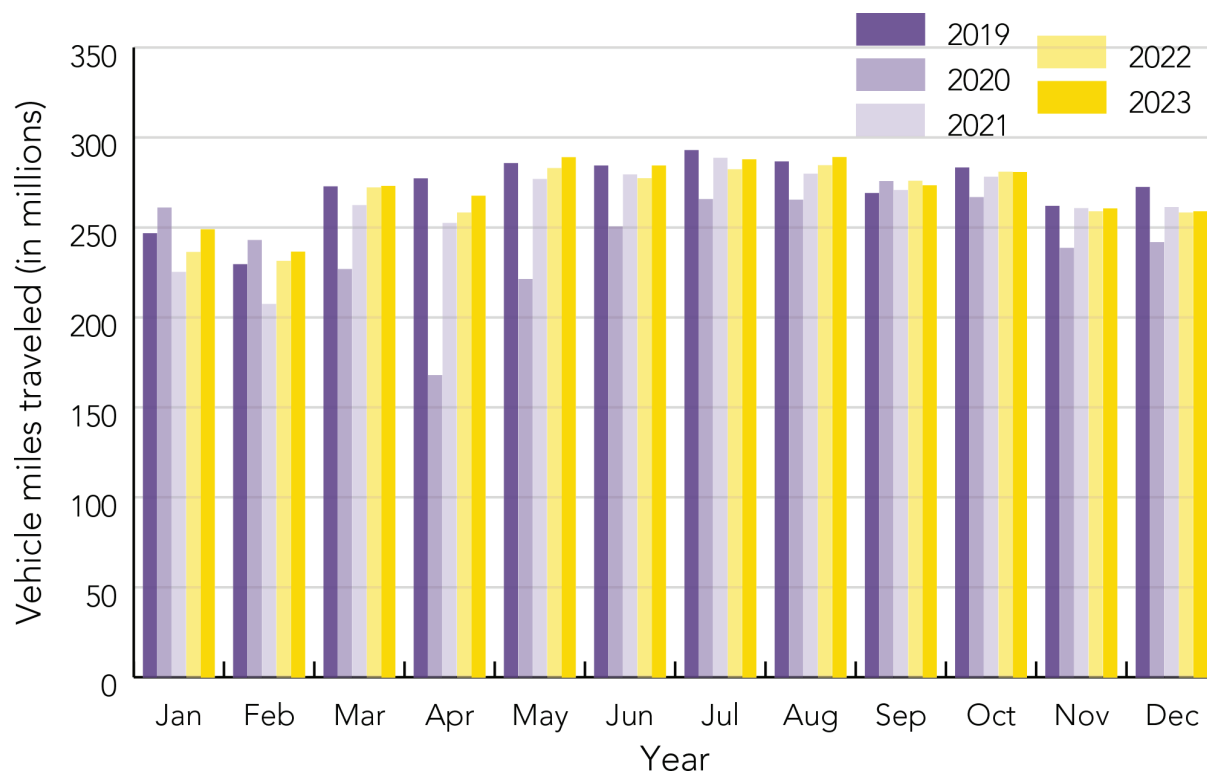
Given the rapid rate at which states are legalizing marijuana and the frequency with which traffic crash victims are found with multiple controlled substances in their systems, it is important for law enforcement to have sophisticated roadside testing tools for detecting impaired drivers. While breathalyzers and standard field sobriety tests for alcohol impairment have been used for decades, methods for detecting cannabis and other drug use are becoming more reliable.

32. Kate Bryan, "Cannabis Overview," National Conference of State Legislators, last modified June 20, 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/cannabis-overview>.

33. Level 1 trauma centers have 24-hour availability of surgeons across multiple specialties, meaning that they can perform operations at all hours of the day. "Trauma Center Levels Explained," American Trauma Society, accessed July 25, 2025, <https://www.amtrauma.org/page/traumalevels>.

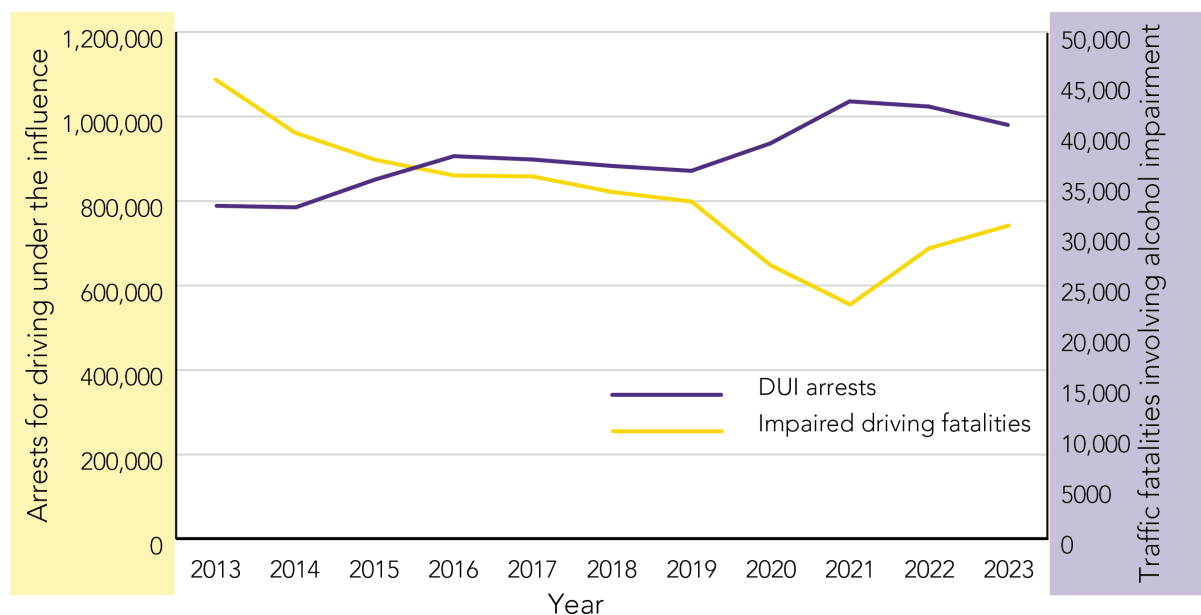
34. F.D. Thomas et al., *Drug Prevalence among Seriously or Fatally Injured Road Users*, Report No. DOT HS 813 399 (Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2022), https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2022-12/Alcohol-Drug-Prevalence-Among-Road-Users-Report_112922-tag.pdf.

Figure 8. Vehicle miles traveled in the United States, 2019–2023



Source: Office of Highway Policy Information, "Travel Monitoring," U.S. Department of Transportation, last modified March 6, 2025, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/travel_monitoring/tvt.cfm.

Figure 9. DUI arrests and impaired fatalities, 2013–2023



Source: Crime Data Explorer, "Arrests Reported in the United States," Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed July 24, 2025, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/arrest>; NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), "Persons Killed, by Highest Driver Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) in the Crash, 1994–2023 – State: USA," FARS (Fatality Analysis Reporting System), accessed July 24, 2025, <https://www.fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/Trends/TrendsAlcohol.aspx>.

Pedestrian fatalities

Leaders pointed to another troubling trend they believe is associated with increased traffic fatalities: inattentive behavior by pedestrians. Meeting participants stressed that while they'd seen an increase in reckless driving during the first months of the pandemic, they'd also observed pedestrians engaging in riskier behaviors more often, such as crossing the street outside of sidewalks and public intoxication.



Some leaders hypothesized that the pandemic had drawn more pedestrians outside as a way of practicing safe social distancing, which also—anecdotally—increased the number of pedestrians on the road who could end up being victims.

Some meeting attendees called attention to the vulnerability of homeless people as they traverse city streets on foot. In January 2024, for example, a 65-year-old homeless man was walking on Pacific Coast Highway in Long Beach, California, when a driver fatally struck him from behind.* And in September 2024, an engine with the Long Beach Fire Department hit a 61-year-old man who “was lying in front of the station’s roll-up door when it opened to let the engine out.”† To reduce pedestrian deaths in these kinds of situations, agencies like the Long Beach Police Department provide outreach services to the homeless community, encouraging behavioral health treatment for substance use disorders and mental illness.

What is not immediately clear, though, is whether or how pedestrian behavior contributed to the drop in all traffic fatalities beginning in 2022 (at a time when pedestrian fatalities, however, remained high; see figure 3 on page 4). Theoretically, a resumption of enforcement could be partially responsible for this decrease, along with pedestrian patterns returning to pre-pandemic normalcy.

* Fernando Haro Garcia, “Authorities ID Man Killed in Hit-and-Run Crash Near LBCC,” Long Beach Post News, last updated January 4, 2024, <https://lbpost.com/news/crime/authorities-id-man-killed-in-hit-and-run-crash-near-lbcc>.

† Jeremiah Dobruck, “Man Killed by Fire Engine Was Lying in Front of Station’s Garage Door, Long Beach Police Say,” Long Beach Post News, last updated September 24, 2024, <https://lbpost.com/news/person-dead-after-being-hit-by-fire-engine-outside-belmont-shore-station/>.

In March 2025, Minnesota's Department of Public Safety completed a pilot test of two breathalyzer-like devices capable of detecting drug impairment, involving 41 law enforcement agencies across 36 counties.³⁵ The devices can identify amphetamines, benzodiazepines, cannabinoids, cocaine, methamphetamine, and opiates. The pilot results showed that **these devices detected drugs in more than 87 percent of samples, with cannabinoids, methamphetamine, and amphetamines being the most common.**³⁶

Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Downing of the Colorado State Patrol talked about how the prevalence of marijuana use and its impact on traffic safety is just now coming to light.

"We went back a number of years after marijuana was legalized and tested a bunch of old blood samples. We found that 71 percent of everyone arrested for alcohol DUI actually tested positive for poly drug use.³⁷ That's really the main thing we've seen the past several years: It's alcohol and drugs together. Every trooper now goes through ARIDE, which is Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement. Their ability to determine if someone is impaired doesn't need to include what they're impaired with at the time of arrest. They just need to decide that someone's ability to operate a motor vehicle is impaired. The trooper can make the arrest and then go through lab testing. ARIDE gives the troopers more skills to identify a wider range of symptoms that the driver is experiencing."

Importance of educating motorists

Chief Karl Oakman of the Kansas City (Kansas) Police Department talked about the increased number of impaired drivers in fatal crashes the year after marijuana was legalized.

"When I was the deputy chief over patrol in Kansas City, Missouri, we had a double whammy happen in 2019 with [the onset of] COVID and the legalization of marijuana. **Citizens mistakenly thought, once it became legal, you could drive while under the influence of marijuana.** We saw our crash fatalities went up to 103; 59 percent of those were drug- or alcohol-related, with the majority being marijuana-related, and 74 percent were not wearing seatbelts. The year before, we had 78 fatalities with 22 percent drug- or alcohol-related. So, one of the things we tried to do is educate the public about the dangers of driving under the influence of marijuana."

But the burden of educating the public about the law and the dangers of driving while under the influence of marijuana does not have to rest solely on the shoulders of law enforcement. "Attack the issue from multiple avenues," encouraged Chief Jeffrey Satur of the Longmont (Colorado) Police Department. "We have a great partnership with the Colorado Department of Transportation and Colorado State Patrol, who do a ton of education enforcement with our Department of Transportation. Everyone thought you could drive and smoke pot, so educating folks that it is illegal has been extremely important."

35. Office of Traffic Safety, "Roadside Screening Tools could Help Law Enforcement Detect Drug-Impaired Driving," Minnesota Department of Public Safety, last modified March 18, 2025, <https://dps.mn.gov/news/ots/roadside-screening-tools-could-help-law-enforcement-detect-drug-impaired-driving>.

36. Office of Traffic Safety, "Roadside Screening Tools" (see note 35).

37. Lt. Col. Downing added that in 2024, the number of drivers testing positive for multiple substance use dropped to 49 percent—likely because of a process change leading to prompter testing and more reliable results.

Using Data to Inform Decision-Making



Where police conduct traffic enforcement doesn't always align with where community members say it should be done. This is why it's so important for police leaders to publicly share crash data and explain to the community the reasons for deployment decisions.

Balancing crash data and community complaints

"When the public clambers for speed enforcement in residential neighborhoods and places where you rarely have serious or fatal crashes," Richard Retting of the National Academies Transportation Research Board urges law enforcement to stay focused on where the real harm is being done—"arterial roadways with speed limits of 35, 45, and 50 miles an hour. I'm talking about roads that typically have four or six lanes, a median, and lots of pedestrians and buses. But arterials are sort of the stepchild, because the public focus is on neighborhoods, streets, and school zones."

In light of a staffing shortage, Sergeant Ken Collier described how the Sacramento Police Department balances giving enforcement attention to the major arterial roadways where serious traffic crashes are occurring against the community's unrelenting requests for traffic enforcement in their neighborhoods:

"The way we approach the high volume of community complaints is to take those arterial roadways that lead into neighborhoods and where we have our highest volume of major injury and fatal collisions. Those arterials lead into neighborhoods, and so what we do is primarily focus our speed enforcement, distracted driving, right of way, violation enforcement on those arterial roadways, and then we'll creep into the neighborhoods. We'll go work a stop sign. We'll throw our lights on to make our presence known, whether it's for equipment violations or any little stops that we can make in those neighborhoods. We do that so the neighbors see we're there, but then we roll right back out on those arterials and hammer that."

Commander Nicole Jones said the San Francisco Police Department's annual traffic enforcement plan is heavily informed by the prior year's crash data:

"It's led to a strategy we call 'wave enforcement,' which we use at our top 10 crash locations citywide. The strategy is similar to the Koper Curve in hot spot policing, where an officer spends 15-minute intervals at a specific location throughout the day. What we're doing is sending our motorcycle officers at random times during the day to those top 10 crash locations. We're sending our officers out there for two hours, twice a week, and then leaving the location alone for three weeks and coming back on week four."

Speed studies

The Overland Park Police Department focuses its traffic enforcement on three primary safety concerns: (1) speeding complaints, (2) complaints of traffic issues in school zones, and (3) frequent crash locations. However, before deploying scarce resources, Captain Steven Edwards said, the department does its homework to validate the complaints: **"We do a lot of speed studies through complaints and crash locations. Our squeaky wheels get a speed study. If it's justified, we'll send officers out. If it's not, we give them that feedback."**

To conduct the speed studies, the Overland Park Police Department uses feedback signs and stealth boxes. Speed feedback signs can be portable or permanently installed. They gather location-specific speed data and can display messages that alert drivers when they are speeding, encouraging them to slow down. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), "A [2021] meta-analysis of dynamic speed feedback devices [by Fisher et al.] found that these devices are effective at reducing speed at installation locations for different vehicle types across a variety of roadway contexts."

Stealth boxes take a different approach to collecting and sharing speed data with motorists. Inconspicuously mounted on a pole, they track and record vehicle speeds. However, unlike speed enforcement cameras, they do not issue citations; instead, officials can send registered owners a letter notifying them of the radar's findings.³⁸ While it has not yet been implemented, Captain Edwards characterized this approach as a "force multiplier" through education rather than enforcement: "We're saying, 'Hey, we see you. This is what your vehicle was doing, whether you were driving it or not. Please slow down.'"

Police agencies can also use the data to measure the extent of the speeding problem; ascertain the time of day when the most or worst speeders are on the road; and determine whether they should conduct targeted patrols to identify, stop, and cite speeders.³⁹

38. Julian March, "City Pins Hopes on Stealth Radar to Combat Speeding," Star News Online, last modified January 6, 2014, <https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/2014/01/06/city-pins-hopes-on-stealth-radar-to-combat-speeding/30950557007/>.

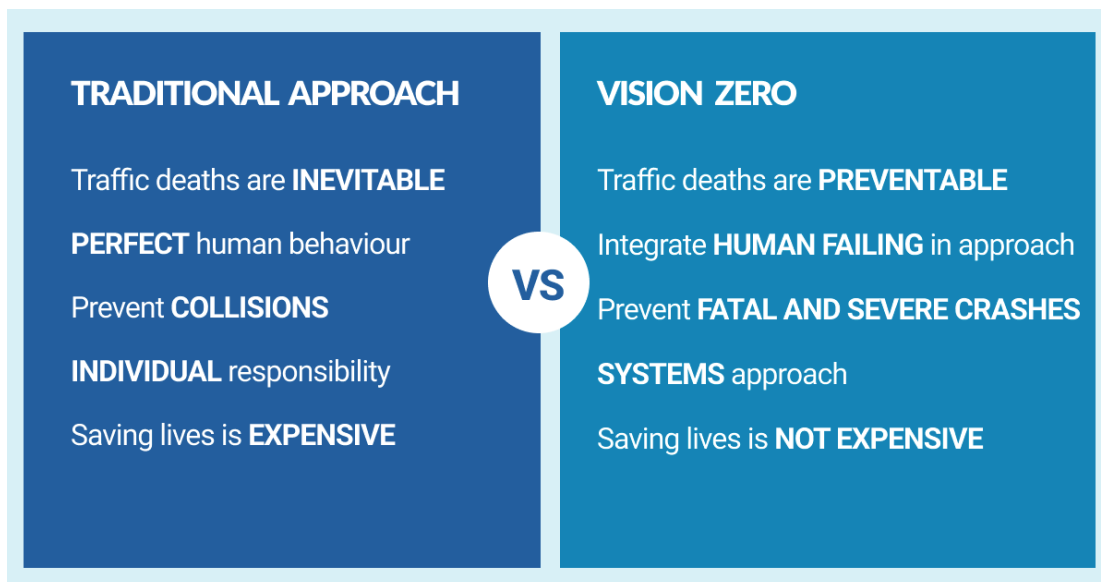
39. March, "City Pins Hopes" (see note 38).

Vision Zero



Understanding that enforcement alone cannot solve the problem, many municipalities have adopted a more holistic approach to reducing traffic fatalities. Vision Zero, which originated in Sweden in the 1990s,⁴⁰ is a broad term for policies and ideas aimed at eliminating all traffic fatalities by working upstream to prevent human errors that lead to crashes and designing roads and cars to reduce crash forces to survivable levels. Also known as the Safe System Approach, Vision Zero suggests that traffic fatalities are preventable and that road and environmental design can directly influence driver behavior (figure 10).⁴¹

Figure 10. Traditional vs. Vision Zero approaches to reducing traffic fatalities



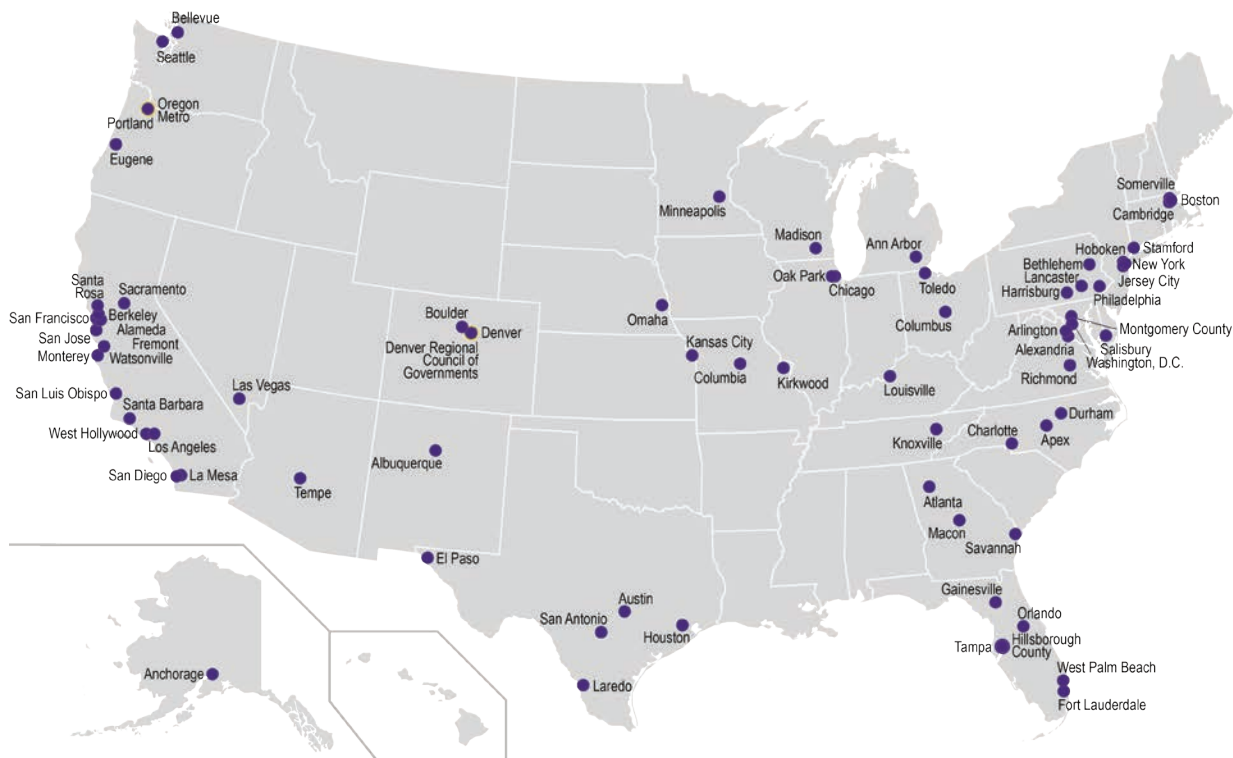
Source: "What is Vision Zero?" (see note 11).

40. "Vision Zero – A History," Action Vision Zero, accessed July 24, 2025, <https://actionvisionzero.org/resources/vision-zero-a-brief-history/>.

41. "What is Vision Zero?" (see note 11).

Although there is no official count of jurisdictions that have adopted Vision Zero—there is no certification or regulatory process to designate a community as a Vision Zero community—the Vision Zero Network estimates that at least 74 municipalities have incorporated its principles into their traffic safety strategies (figure 11).⁴²

Figure 11. U.S. communities that have adopted Vision Zero principles



Source: “Vision Zero Communities” (see note 42).

System design and law enforcement are interdependent and equally critical in achieving zero traffic deaths. Vision Zero is a commitment by traffic safety officials and those who are responsible for road and vehicle design to work together to identify and implement system changes that can eliminate the causes of traffic deaths by centering on three primary mechanisms: education, engineering, and enforcement. Some examples of Vision Zero initiatives include reducing speed limits, re-engineering roads, redesigning vehicles to reduce passenger injuries during collisions, studying high-crash areas, installing bike lanes and sidewalks, narrowing the widths of streets and turning radii, and targeting enforcement in fatality “hot spots.”

In developing Vision Zero plans, jurisdictions should first identify the streets with the highest rates of fatalities and injuries. These High Injury Networks (HIN)—the few streets or intersections responsible for most injuries and deaths—are the first areas to receive Vision Zero treatments, according to the strategy.⁴³ As in hotspot policing, jurisdictions can concentrate their resources on places where they are likely to benefit the most people; HINs are often the first targets of new engineering projects, one of the strategies for achieving zero fatalities. Building from this focus on the HIN, Vision Zero’s goal is to ensure that Safe System designs cover all streets and roads.

42. “Vision Zero Communities,” Vision Zero Network, accessed July 17, 2025, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1-aN1-2gn0JNKZ_GacxehL62S4QofhFmEeySNr-X0AOg/.

43. “About Vision Zero,” City of Alexandria, Virginia, last modified April 3, 2025, <https://www.alexandriava.gov/VisionZero>.

Is it effective?

Research has shown that Vision Zero programs may prevent injuries and save money. A study in New York City showed that Vision Zero resulted in substantial protection for socioeconomically disadvantaged populations, which are known to face a heightened risk of injury, along with savings of more than \$90 million in Medicaid expenditures in the first five years of adoption.⁴⁴ A study in Boston, Massachusetts, found that reducing the speed limit on Boston's roads from 30 miles per hour to 25 miles per hour resulted in slower traffic, an important finding as serious injuries and fatalities are more likely in collisions at higher speeds.⁴⁵ In Austin, Texas, researchers reported a reduction in crashes, serious injuries, and deaths on streets that were redesigned using Vision Zero principles.⁴⁶ And in San Francisco, researchers observed a decrease in vehicle speeds on roadways redesigned according to Vision Zero principles.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, further research is needed to determine Vision Zero's full effects.



Can the objective of Vision Zero be achieved?

In 2017, the Alexandria, Virginia, city council adopted a Vision Zero resolution. The 10-year plan took effect in 2018. From 2019 to 2023, there were 109 serious injury and fatal crashes—averaging about 22 per year. By 2023, they had a considerable reduction in serious injury crashes and zero fatalities.

*— Chief Shahram Fard,
Falls Church (Virginia)
Police Department,
former deputy chief, Alexandria
(Virginia) Police Department*

44. Kacie L. Dragan and Sherry A. Glied, "Major Traffic Safety Reform and Road Traffic Injuries among Low-Income New York Residents, 2009–2021," *American Journal of Public Health* 114, no. 6 (2024), 633–641, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2024.307617>.
45. Wen Hu and Jessica B. Cicchino, "Lowering the Speed Limit from 30 MPH to 25 MPH in Boston: Effects on Vehicle Speeds," *Injury Prevention: Journal of the International Society for Child and Adolescent Injury Prevention* 26, no. 2 (2020), 99–102, <https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2018-043025>.
46. *Crash Reductions Seen at Austin's Major Intersection Safety Locations*, Vision Zero Analytics (Austin, TX: City of Austin, 2022), <https://www.austintexas.gov/department/vision-zero#imgsrcsitesdefaultfilesfilesTransportationVision20ZeroVZPlansReportsIcon2022pngaltPlansandReportsiconwidth93height93PlansandReports>.
47. Leonard M. Lopoo et al., "An Evaluation of a Vision Zero Traffic-Calming Intervention, an Urban Transportation Safety Policy," *Journal of Urban Affairs* (2024), 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2024.2314040>.

It takes time to change vehicles and roads, so Vision Zero is a long-term investment. With more than four million miles of roads and more than 300 million vehicles, the United States has a greater dependence on personal automobiles for transportation than European countries.⁴⁸ According to a study published in the *International Journal of Transportation Research*, **the cities with the most success implementing Vision Zero in the United States are those “with higher walking and transit (and biking to a lesser extent) commute mode.”**⁴⁹ Similarly, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reported that cities with fewer cars on the road—and those that implement systems to make streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists (including lowering speed limits)—will likely see the best results.⁵⁰ Data from the first six months of 2025 in New York City’s congestion relief zones—areas of Manhattan where an additional toll is charged to enter—show that traffic fatalities have decreased by 40 percent in the zone compared to the same period in 2024.⁵¹

More than enforcement

At PERF’s meeting, multiple agencies shared their experiences with implementing Vision Zero. Major David Hill of the Loudoun County (Virginia) Sheriff’s Office emphasized the importance of taking a balanced approach. “You have to have all three Es: education, enforcement, and engineering,” Hill said. “You can’t approach it from one perspective.”

Recognizing that enforcement alone will not resolve every traffic safety issue may be the most important lesson for police agencies when adopting Vision Zero. Vision Zero is an opportunity to relinquish sole responsibility for addressing complex road safety challenges and to invite other stakeholders to help identify the root causes of traffic crashes and develop solutions that change drivers’ behaviors for safer roadways. Chief Jeffrey Satur of the Longmont (Colorado) Police Department addressed this issue head on: “I think it’s really easy for us in policing to focus on enforcement, and we’re going to do that no matter what. But we have to grab all the partners that we can get and educate them, and educate the public, and build a coalition to attack [this issue] from every single avenue.”

Chief Shahram Fard highlighted the collaborative approach Falls Church, Virginia, has adopted. “When we have a serious crash,” Fard said, “the police department has a collaborative review process with the City’s traffic engineers, and we dissect what happened. Do we need to change anything with roadway design? Do we need to do more traffic safety marketing and education? Then perhaps there’s an enforcement perspective.”

In Montgomery County, Maryland, the commitment to Vision Zero is reflected in its hiring of a coordinator who reports directly to the county executive. According to Assistant Chief David McBain of the Montgomery County Police Department, “The coordinator is kind of a hub

48. Nicholas N. Ferenchak, “U.S. Vision Zero Cities: Modal Fatality Trends and Strategy Effectiveness,” *Transportation Letters* 15, no. 8 (2003), 957–968, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19427867.2022.2116673>.

49. Ferenchak, “U.S. Vision Zero Cities” (see note 48).

50. “Vehicle Height Compounds Dangers of Speed for Pedestrians,” Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, last modified December 10, 2024, <https://www.iihs.org/news/detail/vehicle-height-compounds-dangers-of-speed-for-pedestrians>.

51. Transportation Alternatives, “New Data from Transportation Alternatives and Families for Safe Streets Shows Vision Zero Works, Should Be Expanded; Congestion Pricing Has Made Streets Safer,” last modified July 22, 2025, <https://transalt.org/press-releases/new-data-from-transportation-alternatives-and-families-for-safe-streets-shows-vision-zero-works-should-be-expanded-congestion-pricing-has-made-streets-safer>.

with fire and rescue, police, and Department of Transportation.” McBain also explained how Montgomery County analyzes crash data to inform its engineering, education, and enforcement strategies:

“We identify high incident networks—corridors or roadways where we see an unusually high number of collisions—and then we try to determine why those collisions occur. We rely heavily on data and hyper focus on major arterial roadways. A couple of the specific things we do are shrinking the width of a roadway to slow down traffic and squaring off intersections to make them safer for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists alike.”

Education

Education and outreach are critical facets of Vision Zero, though like other parts of the system they cannot be expected to solve safety problems by themselves. Campaigns on roads and social media endeavor to make drivers aware of targeted enforcement efforts and how to be safer drivers.

Major Jovan Campbell of the Miami Beach (Florida) Police Department identified e-bikes and e-scooters as the biggest source of their traffic-related community complaints. “We have pedestrians who believe that those things are putting their safety at risk, so they rely on us to enforce violations. And we’re doing signage and education campaigns via social media to try to mitigate the issues, but it is very challenging.”

Examples of education campaigns

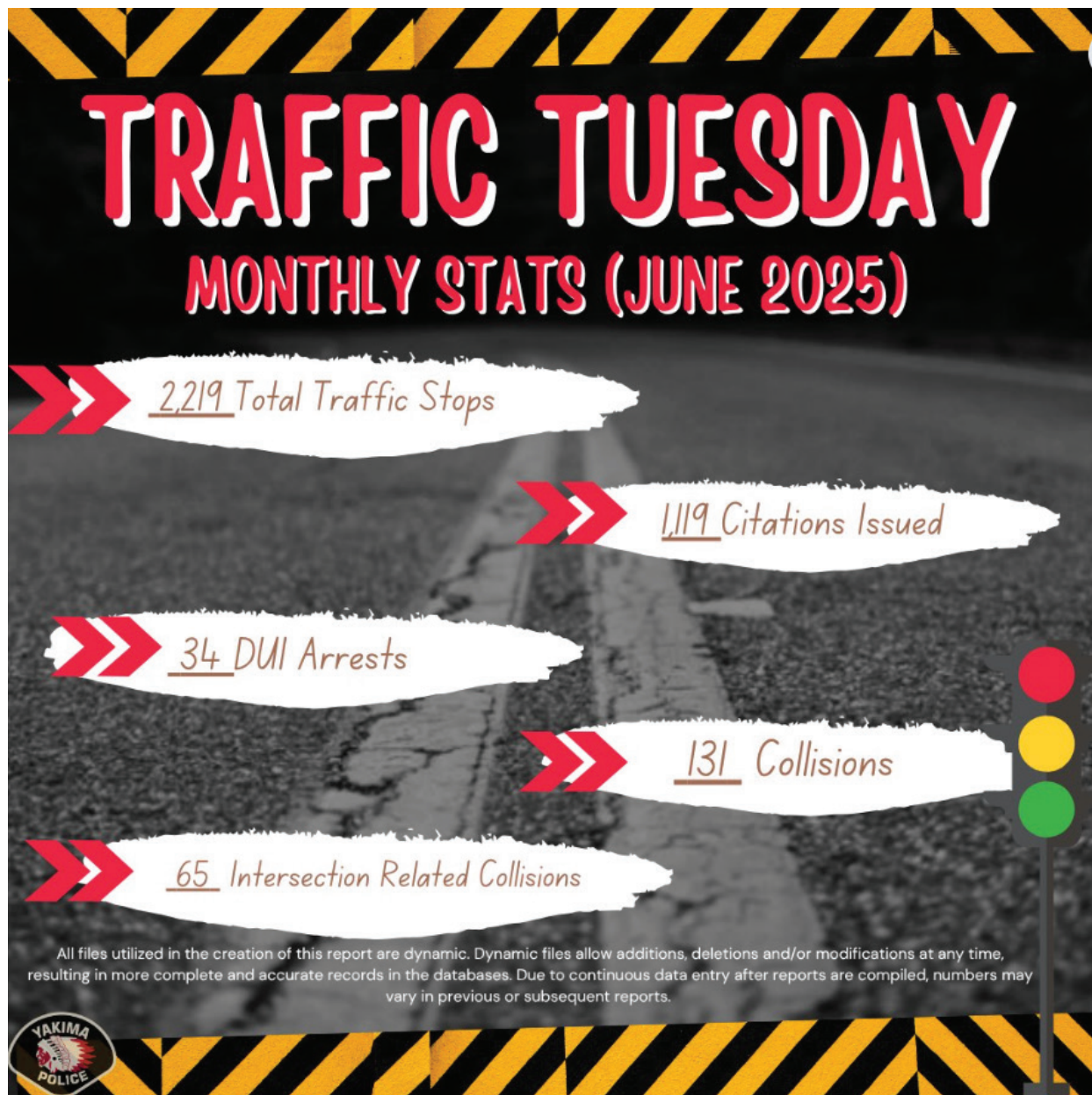
Lieutenant Colonel Chris Sawyer of the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office talked about how the use of electronic signboards to educate the public about a traffic safety risk is often preferable to taking enforcement action:

“We may find an intersection has many rear-end crashes. Simply applying extra enforcement at that intersection may increase rear-end crashes, as drivers approaching the light might slam on their brakes even harder when they see us sitting there. Instead, we’ll place signboards 100 to 200 yards before the intersection saying ‘High crash area. Please pay attention.’ This type of targeted response is designed to address specific crash types differently than always deploying deputies or traffic motor officers.”

“Traffic Tuesday” is a social media campaign of the Yakima (Washington) Police Department to promote traffic safety. Every Tuesday, Lieutenant Ira Cavin said, the department posts the number of traffic stops, the number of citations issued for red light violations, and the number of reported collisions for the prior week—along with traffic safety tips (figure 12 on page 24):

“The community has been happy to see us out doing that. And we went from having nine fatal crashes in the city in 2021 with 12 related deaths, to only two fatal incidents last year, none of which was caused by drivers. Our internal affairs office just published last year’s annual report, and we were actually down one complaint from last year, meaning we didn’t see an increase in complaints even with nearly double the number of traffic contacts.”

Figure 12. Weekly social media posts by the Yakima Police Department aim to inform the community about enforcement actions taken and deter risky driving behaviors



Source: "Yakima Police Department, Facebook, last modified July 8, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1146863640808505>.

Practicing procedural justice

Beyond well-developed community outreach programs, news media campaigns, social media messaging, and roadside alerts, police officers can educate the community about road safety—all while creating community goodwill, legitimacy, and trust—through the application of procedural justice principles during traffic stops. Christine Cole, senior advisor at 21CP Solutions and former executive director of the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management at Harvard University, expressed disbelief that police officers would reject the idea of explaining to motorists the reason for stopping them:

“I can’t imagine why we wouldn’t tell the community what we’re doing. If we’re really trying to change behavior, I think we should tell people what we’re doing and explain why, consistent with concepts of procedural justice. It reminds me of the randomized control trial [criminology professor] Lorraine Mazerolle did in Australia on DUI, where one group of officers made stops in the regular method and the other group of officers explained why they were making the stops, explained why the contact was important (because of an increase in traffic fatalities in the neighborhood), and explained that community members were concerned [about motorists driving under the influence]. The citizen satisfaction level, whether the driver was [issued a citation] or not, was higher for the [experimental group]. I think this [makes the case] that the more we can explain to the community why we do what we do really matters.”

The potential value of explaining to motorists the reason(s) for a stop cannot be overstated. Assuming the stop is associated with an agency’s efforts to address an ongoing traffic safety issue (e.g., five crashes with injuries in the past three months at an intersection), it educates the driver about how their infraction (e.g., speeding or turning right against a traffic control device) is related to that safety issue and affirms they aren’t being randomly singled out. Furthermore, taking time to explain the traffic safety issue to motorists increases community awareness of the problem, lets people know the police department is doing something about the problem, and improves the chances other drivers will change their risky behaviors. Simply put, informing drivers the reason(s) why they were stopped should be baked into an agency’s culture.

Engineering

Engineering is another cornerstone of Vision Zero. A core tenet of the initiative is that streets can be re-engineered to be safer for all motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists. Common strategies include building separated bike lanes, median refuges, and curb extensions and installing better lighting.⁵² New York City and Washington, D.C., are two cities that have invested significantly in these kinds of roadway improvements. In the first 10 months of 2022, New York City completed 1,200 discrete engineering projects to make its streets safer for everyone (see an example in figure 13 on page 26),⁵³ and between 2021 and 2025, Washington, D.C., completed more than 100 roadway improvements and 300 intersection improvements (see an example in figure 14 on page 28).⁵⁴

52. “Engineering for Safety,” Vision Zero DC, accessed July 11, 2025, <https://visionzero.dc.gov/pages/engineering>.

53. “Engineering,” NYC Vision Zero, accessed July 11, 2025, <https://www.nyc.gov/content/visionzero/pages/engineering>.

54. “Engineering for Safety” (see note 52).

Figure 13. Before (top) and after (bottom) a Vision Zero engineering project in New York City



Note the physical separation for bicyclists.

Source: "Engineering" (see note 53).

Vision Zero initiatives are not without controversy. Many engineering projects frustrate special interest groups and community members. From environmentalists to bicycle enthusiasts to neighborhood associations, diverse stakeholders can have competing needs. Making concessions to improve safety can be difficult, and municipalities will need to educate stakeholders and balance their needs when choosing engineering projects.

Chief Satur spoke about the politics of road engineering at the PERF meeting. "We have a center median on our main street through downtown," Satur said. "Even with crosswalks, people get hit there all the time. We brought in an engineer who said, 'Cut down the trees. Drivers will then see the pedestrians and they'll stop getting run over.'"

As is often the case, resolving one problem begets another. According to Chief Satur, the engineer's recommendation to cut down trees to promote roadway visibility and reduce pedestrian crashes sparked a backlash from those who sought to protect the environment. Similar stories routinely play out across the country regarding protected bike lanes, with advocates calling for their installation to promote cyclist safety and opponents complaining that they reduce the number or width of lanes for vehicular traffic.

Enforcement

Road safety experts at PERF's meeting emphasized how enforcement—more than engineering or education—has the greatest potential for having a timely effect on road safety. According to Dr. Jeffrey Michael of Johns Hopkins University,

“Clearly, to make substantial changes, we need better roads, better vehicles, and better driver behavior. Better roads and better vehicles are coming; we’ve got a good start on those, but they’re long-term investments. Changing behavior is where the benefit over the next decade or two will come, and that’s dependent on traffic enforcement. There isn’t anything more effective than traffic enforcement to improve driver behavior.”

Keith Williams of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) echoed these comments: “We know that when departments are strong on high-visibility enforcement, we can change behavior; we can get people to stop taking risks and behave more responsibly on roads.”

Seat belt enforcement

Meeting participants specifically identified seat belt enforcement as an example of a highly successful enforcement campaign. “Seat belt enforcement is perhaps the biggest success story for traffic safety,” Dr. Michael said. “Seat belts have saved roughly half a million people

Reducing crime (and traffic crashes) by building community trust

With more than 29 years of law enforcement experience, Arlington (Texas) Police Chief Alexander Jones has learned that good intentions don’t always produce desired outcomes. “Whenever we have problems in the community,” Jones said, “the first thing we do is throw a whole bunch of resources at it and say, ‘Make as many traffic stops as you can to bring this problem down.’ But it doesn’t solve anything.”

Today, Chief Jones looks to create a sense of community ownership for solving problems of crime and disorder. Through a program called Operation Connect, the Arlington Police Department (APD) distributes pamphlets to explain its enforcement actions. “We’re making traffic stops because we’re trying to reduce fatalities,” a typical message reads. “We want you to be a part of what we’re trying to do, whether it’s slowing down or calling 911 to provide information.”

Operation Connect is carried out in conjunction with the Safe Road Initiative, a data-driven approach to deployment that uses social media to let people know the APD is going to be in a particular area at a specific time of day for a certain purpose. As a result, according to Chief Jones, Arlington has experienced a 17 percent crime reduction and is starting to see a reduction in traffic crashes and fatalities. Even more importantly, said Jones, “We’re starting to see the trust in areas where we traditionally didn’t engage the community.”



Chief Alexander Jones

Figure 14. Median / pedestrian refuge island in Washington, D.C.



Source: "Engineering for Safety" (see note 51).

nationwide, and I think over half of that is due to the enforcement that was done through high visibility enforcement campaigns and more serious fines."⁵⁵

And Richard Retting of the National Academies Transportation Research Board described how the benefits of enforcing seat belt laws extend beyond road safety: "When motorists are stopped for not wearing their seat belt, police are also able to arrest fugitives who would otherwise remain a threat to public safety and gun and drug offenders who are transporting contraband on the roadways."

Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Downing of the Colorado State Patrol agreed: "Police officers save lives. We need to take every opportunity to save a life. If that's stopping somebody who doesn't have a seat belt on or who is speeding, whatever that is, that's what we do."

Commander Craig Valenzuela of the Los Angeles Police Department noted that enforcement is a key element of Vision Zero, alongside engineering. "My argument is we can't engineer our way out of

problems alone. And I think in Los Angeles, we have largely gotten to the point where people believe that we can. . . . I think one of the biggest things that we do in policing is save lives. And one of the ways we save lives is [by conducting enforcement]."

Enforcement does not require a citation

Conducting enforcement doesn't necessarily mean issuing citations. Multiple agency leaders made this point. According to Assistant Chief David Powell of the Knoxville (Tennessee) Police Department, "We're looking at all aspects of where fatal crashes are occurring, but the big thing is to have the cops go out and work with the community. If a ticket is needed, write a ticket. But if a warning works, work with a warning. You don't have to write a ticket on every traffic stop."

Chief Alexander Jones of the Arlington (Texas) Police Department instructs his officers similarly: "One of the things I tell my officers is that I want you to do traffic stops, but it's not about the output. It's about changing behavior: Putting their seat belts on, obeying stop signs, slowing down."

55. "In 2016, seat belts saved nearly 15,000 lives . . . between 1960 and 2012, seat belts saved . . . 329,715 lives." NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), "Seat Belts Save Lives," U.S. Department of Transportation, accessed July 25, 2025, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/seat-belts/seat-belts-save-lives>.

As New Jersey State Police stopped fewer cars, traffic crashes and fatalities increased

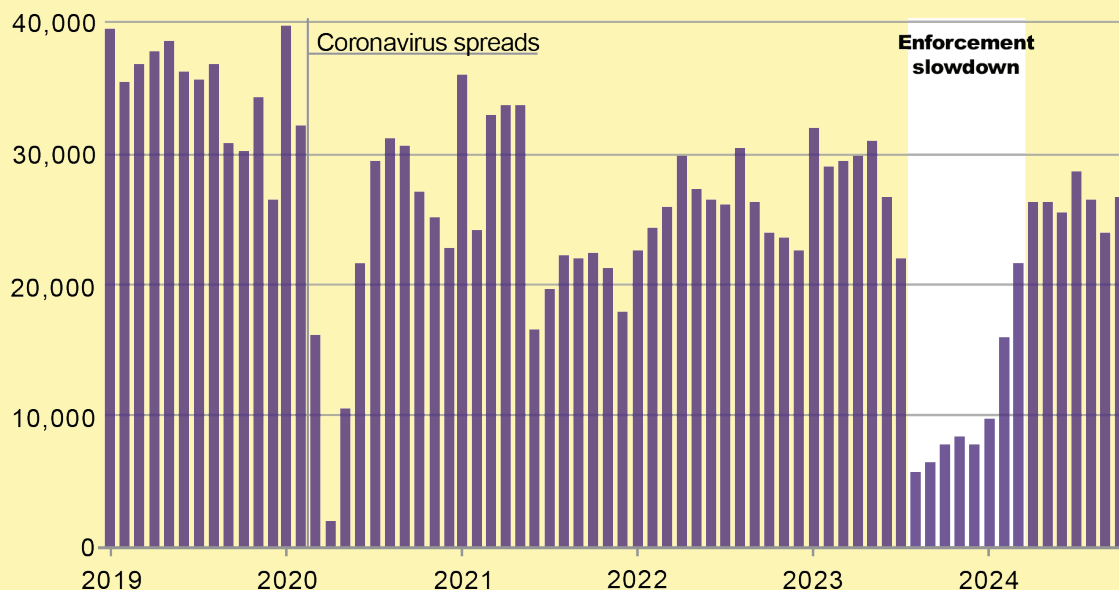
“The New Jersey State Police was under a consent decree for many years, and monitorship fell to an arm of the attorney general’s office,” said Tom Eicher, who retired as Director of the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability at the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General. “We saw some persistent patterns of unequal law enforcement results in that white motorists were much more likely to not get a ticket and to receive a warning or no action than Asian, Black, or Hispanic motorists in certain circumstances. The outcome—and this has been publicly reported—was the union allegedly told the officers to just stop enforcement.*



Tom Eicher

“Within less than a month, traffic stops dropped by 90 percent. [See figure A.] This happened in the summer of 2023, and there was a gradual increase in crashes and fatalities. We didn’t see an immediate change, but after about five or six months, we saw the number of crashes and fatalities going dramatically up.† And our theory was, it took a while for people to realize, ‘Hey, I can go 100 miles an hour on the interstate highways, and state police isn’t going to pull me over.’”

Figure A. New Jersey State Police issued far fewer citations from July 2023 to March 2024 than they had in years past



Source: Graphic adapted from Leanne Abraham in Tully, “For 8 Months,; data from New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety

* Tracey Tully, “For 8 Months, Traffic Enforcement on New Jersey’s Highways Plummeted,” The New York Times, December 8, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/08/nyregion/new-jersey-state-police-slowdown.html>.

† According to New Jersey State Police crash data published by The New York Times, “Traffic deaths during the first six months of [2024] climbed by 23 percent, even as fatalities fell by 3 percent across the country.” Tully, “For 8 Months”.



Balancing Act: Enforcing Traffic Laws and Maintaining Public Trust



During the worst of the pandemic and the widespread social unrest following the murder of George Floyd, state legislatures, city and county governments, prosecutors, and even some police agencies began imposing restrictions on traffic enforcement on the premise that it disproportionately impacts minority communities. Ronald Teachman, Training Director of the Prince William County (Virginia) Police Department, provided important context for the movement to decriminalize certain traffic offenses: Those offenses disproportionately affect already marginalized communities. “There’s an obvious connection between income and certain vehicle offenses. Rich people in [wealthy communities] don’t have defective equipment. Their vehicles are insured and registered, so you’re not going to get those kinds of status offenses. This creates an income focus that has a race connection. The intent of the legislation is to remedy that disparate impact. Proponents aren’t trying to regulate officer behavior.”

Limitations on traffic stops

Limitations on stops for non-safety related offenses

Arguing that public safety and traffic safety are not necessarily the same thing, policy reform efforts have focused on curtailing traffic stops, primarily with respect to minor violations like broken taillights or obscured license plates. Proponents of such changes contend that traffic stops conducted for these kinds of violations, have little or no legitimate public safety function and argue that officers should police only the most reckless offenses.⁵⁶ Some police leaders, though, argue that stripping officers of the authority to stop motorists for these low-level violations compromises public safety by removing a mechanism officers can use to recover guns and drugs, interrupt crimes such as burglaries and robberies, and seize other contraband during vehicle searches.

56. Libby Doyle and Susan Nembhard, “Police Traffic Stops Have Little to Do with Public Safety,” Urban Institute, last modified April 26, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/police-traffic-stops-have-little-do-public-safety>.



Commonly referred to as secondary or non-safety related offenses, infractions that are no longer sufficient grounds for a traffic stop in some jurisdictions include cracked or burned-out taillights, obstructed rear-view mirrors, loud exhaust pipes, tinted windows, or failure to wear a seat belt. For example, in 2021, the Ramsey County (Minnesota) Attorney's Office partnered with four police agencies, including the Saint Paul Police Department, "to limit 'non-public safety' traffic stops and searches, or vehicle and equipment violations like expired license plate tabs often used as a pretext to search or investigate a driver."⁵⁷ The results of the policy shift, according to the Justice Innovation Lab (JIL), included a drop of roughly 40 percent in the number of stops in Saint Paul in 2022. At the same time, Black drivers in the participating jurisdictions experienced 66 percent fewer traffic stops, and searches decreased by more than 85 percent in the year after the policy was announced. The JIL reported "the policy had no discernible effect on crime rates."⁵⁸

Commander Craig Valenzuela of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) voiced opposition to these restrictions on making traffic stops:

"The response to these changes from law enforcement officials has been overwhelmingly negative. The belief is that restricting the ability to perform traffic safety will not only make the roads significantly more dangerous, but it will also impair law enforcement's ability to discover drugs and guns."

57. Mohamed Ibrahim, "Limiting Non-Public Safety Traffic Stops in Some Ramsey County Cities Yielded Drop in Racial Disparities," MinnPost, last modified June 15, 2023, <https://www.minnpost.com/public-safety/2023/06/limiting-non-public-safety-traffic-stops-in-some-ramsey-county-cities-yielded-drop-in-racial-disparities/>.

58. Rory Pulvino et al., "Traffic Stop Policy in Ramsey County, MN," Justice Innovation Lab, last modified June 7, 2023, <https://knowledgehub.justiceinnovationlab.org/reports/traffic-stop-policy-ramsey-county>.

Pretextual stops

Pretextual stops continue to be controversial. Citing the *Whren v. United States** Supreme Court decision as the legal authority for conducting pretextual stops, many police chiefs contend they are an important tool in the crime fight. Opponents, on the other hand, argue that pretextual stops disproportionately affect minority communities, erode public trust in law enforcement, and increase the number of dangerous confrontations—often for minor, non-moving violations—between the police and public. These competing perspectives highlight the importance of police agencies providing thoughtful, comprehensive training to ensure officers conduct stops lawfully and according to the principles of procedural justice.

Commander Craig Valenzuela described how the LAPD coaches its officers to record on body-worn camera the reason why they are stopping a motorist even before speaking with them: “We’re asking our folks to turn on their body worn video and talk about how we’ve had a series of robberies, or some other criminal activity in the area related to, say, a white Hyundai. And thus, I want to stop this vehicle on a pretext, and this is the information I know about the crime pattern we’ve had.”



Commander Craig Valenzuela

This practice creates a contemporaneous record of the officer’s probable cause for the stop—such as an object hanging from the rearview mirror, a broken taillight, or inoperable windshield wipers—the underlying reason for which might be that the car and its occupants match the description of a vehicle involved in three armed street robberies in the neighborhood in the past week. As is often the case, the way the officer conducts the stop makes all the difference, not only for how the stop unfolds but also for how the case makes its way through the criminal justice system.

* *Whren et al. v. United States*, 57 U.S. 806 (1996), <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/517/806/>.

Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Downing of the Colorado State Patrol expressed similar misgivings about imposing limitations on the reasons why law enforcement can stop a motorist: “Taking away the ability [of a trooper] to make contact with a person for a ‘low-level’ traffic offense significantly reduces our ability to drive down impaired driving and reduces the safety of our roads.”

Richard Retting of the National Academies Transportation Research Board, however, emphasized how restrictions on traffic stops are nothing new:

“These restrictions go back decades. The earliest one I’m aware of is the prohibition on seat belt stops in states that have seat belt laws. Over a dozen states prohibit primary seat belt enforcement, which means that even if you as a police officer see somebody in violation of the law for not wearing a seat belt, the law doesn’t allow you to make a stop for that reason. There must be another reason for the stop. The seat belt infraction can still be enforced but only if there’s another violation that is associated with the purpose of the stop.”

To the extent policy changes impose enforcement restrictions on police officers, it is incumbent upon agency leaders to ensure officers are properly trained to achieve their traffic safety goals without violating the law or public trust.

Enforcement of risky pedestrian behavior

Police agencies' efforts to reduce pedestrian-involved crashes through enforcement action have also been met by challenges from reform advocates. Under California's Freedom to Walk Act, a police officer shall not stop a pedestrian for jaywalking "unless a reasonably careful person would realize there is an immediate danger of a collision with a moving vehicle or other device moving exclusively by human power."⁵⁹ Estimating that roughly 50 percent of pedestrian fatalities in San Francisco are the fault of the pedestrians themselves, Commander Nicole Jones of the San Francisco Police Department lamented the law's effect on officers' ability to address pedestrians' risky behaviors. "Offenses like jaywalking are no longer enforceable unless the offense could have immediately caused a crash," Jones said. "So that has had a tremendous impact [on our ability to change pedestrians' behavior]."



59. Freedom to Walk Act, Cal. Veh. Code § 21451 et seq. (2022), https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=VEH&division=11.&title=&part=&chapter=2.&article=3.

Reducing racial disparities in traffic stops by focusing on risky behaviors

Daniela Gilbert, Director of the Redefining Public Safety initiative at the Vera Institute of Justice, discussed equipment violations, moving violations, racial imbalance, and voters' opinions. "In the first quarter of 2025, the Vera Institute of Justice commissioned a poll of likely voters from across the political spectrum. Sixty-five percent of respondents thought enforcement of non-safety related stops diverted police attention from other more important priorities. More than 80 percent of respondents said they had positive interactions and positive views of law enforcement. This shows that limiting non-safety related enforcement is a popular idea among supporters of law enforcement and disproves the myth that only people who are 'anti-cop' would want to see change.

According to Gilbert, "In 2013, in response to community concern related to racial disparities in traffic enforcement, Fayetteville, North Carolina, became the first place to implement a policy prioritizing enforcement of risky behavior over non-safety related stops, [such as] a broken taillight or other equipment violations. As a result, enforcement went up, but . . . for unsafe behavior. Racial disparities [in enforcement] went down, and there was no impact on crime. Today, there are about 30 jurisdictions that have some kind of distinction between non-safety related enforcement and safety-related stops."

Chief (Ret.) Harold Medlock of the Fayetteville Police Department (FPD) was the architect of the strategy that focused on "moving violations of immediate concern to public safety:" speeding, stop sign and red light violations, driving under the influence, and reckless driving.* During the three-year study, FPD increased the number of traffic stops conducted for safety reasons by 121 percent; at the same time, total crashes decreased by 13 percent, and traffic fatalities and crashes with injuries decreased by 28 percent and 23 percent, respectively.† Meanwhile, according to Medlock, "Uses of force went down, injuries to citizens and officers went down, and complaints against officers went down."‡

Since the Fayetteville study was published, other jurisdictions have seen similar results after changing their traffic stop policies and practices. For instance, in Ramsey County, Minnesota, "the data analyses indicate that the new traffic stop policies and practices were successful in reducing minor, non-safety related vehicle violation stops; that this reduction resulted in a narrowing of racial differences in traffic stops and searches; and that the policy had no discernible effect on crime rates."§

There is evidence that police officers like the change, too. According to Saint Paul (Minnesota) Police Chief Axel Henry, "They support it. They like it. In fact, most of our officers don't like writing tickets for things they'd rather see you spend your money getting fixed. They don't want to be kind of the bully in the neighborhood."** And FPD Assistant Chief (Ret.) Anthony Kelly said the police "gained legitimacy" in the eyes of the community by only stopping people for moving violations—and, for concerns that didn't pose immediate safety risks, like expired tags, issuing only a friendly reminder.††

* Ahmed Jallow, "What Would Happen If Cops Didn't Make Certain Traffic Stops? This North Carolina City Offers a Case Study," *USA Today*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/04/15/police-reform-fayetteville-burlington-nc-traffic-stops-policing/7225318002/>.

† Mike Dolan Fliss et al., "Re-prioritizing Traffic Stops To Reduce Motor Vehicle Crash Outcomes and Racial Disparities," *Injury Epidemiology* 7 (2020), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-019-0227-6>.

‡ Jallow, "What Would Happen."

§ Rory Pulvino et al., "Traffic Stop Policy in Ramsey County, MN," Justice Innovation Lab, last modified June 7, 2023, <https://knowledgehub.justiceinnovationlab.org/reports/traffic-stop-policy-ramsey-county>.

**Sam Raim, "Police Are Stopping Fewer Drivers—and It's Increasing Safety," Vera Institute of Justice, last modified January 11, 2024, <https://www.vera.org/news/police-are-stopping-fewer-drivers-and-its-increasing-safety>.

†† Raim, "Police Are Stopping."

Limitations on the use of technology

As the rapid pace of technological innovation continues to raise new privacy concerns in many communities, other legislative reform efforts have focused on limiting law enforcement's use of technology to issue vehicle owners traffic citations. These limitations can make it more difficult for police to optimize their performance, according to several of the attendees at PERF's meeting. For example, Major David Hill of the Loudoun County (Virginia) Sheriff's Office said restrictions on cameras and automated license plate readers "hamper our investigative capabilities to address serious or violent crime, which are often detected through traffic enforcement." And Deputy Chief David G. Smyser, whose Urbana (Illinois) Police Department is "facing local restrictions on police use of any kind of surveillance technology," said "this precludes officers from doing the very things they say the police should be doing, . . . such as fair and equitable enforcement."

Working within policy restrictions on enforcement

"When Virginia's legislature took away equipment violations and registration violations as a primary offense in 2020," said Major Hill, "there was a learning curve for officers on how to conduct enforcement." Despite the challenges imposed by these legislative restrictions, many agencies have learned to adapt. Here are several ways law enforcement agencies are equipping and educating officers about how to conduct traffic enforcement in the wake of policy changes designed to curb their authority to make stops.

1. Refocusing enforcement efforts on moving violations and dangerous driving

Agencies are increasing their emphasis on more serious infractions like speeding, reckless driving, DUI, and distracted driving by training officers to prioritize stops that directly relate to roadway safety risks, thereby aligning enforcement with legislative intent. Many departments are also using data-driven approaches (e.g., HINs) to direct enforcement toward locations and behaviors linked to injury or fatal crashes. In Washington, D.C., for example, the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) has teamed up with the city's Department of Public Works "to go after the worst violators out there," focusing not only on those drivers with large numbers of outstanding fines but also "those who don't yield to the crosswalk, are seen on their phone, not wearing a seat belt or driving while impaired or distracted."⁶⁰ This data-driven enforcement initiative—part of the District's Vision Zero strategy to reduce fatalities—has been linked to an 81 percent decrease in traffic fatalities (16 to 3) from January 1 through April 16, 2025, compared to the same period in 2024, according to MPD.⁶¹

2. Expanding the use of technology

Many jurisdictions are using speed cameras and red-light cameras to enforce traffic laws. These cameras, which lead to the issuance of traffic citations to registered vehicle owners without the police having to stop anyone, have been associated with a reduction in speeds and traffic crashes (see "Speed and Red Light Cameras" on

60. Bob Barnard, "DC Police Cracking Down on Drivers with Traffic Safety Violations," FOX 5 DC, last modified April 16, 2025, <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/dc-police-cracking-down-drivers-traffic-safety-violations>.

61. Barnard, "DC Police Cracking Down" (see note 60).

page 42).⁶² Jurisdictions are also increasingly using license plate reader (LPR) technology to identify stolen vehicles or wanted individuals, which helps maintain public safety while minimizing the use of pretextual stops, and companies are developing technology to detect distracted and impaired driving (see “The Future of Traffic Enforcement Technology” on page 44), which will greatly enhance the ability of law enforcement to identify some of the most dangerous drivers on the road.

3. Conducting public safety outreach and education

Police departments are using community engagement and media campaigns to educate the public on traffic safety, seat belt use, and vehicle maintenance. Rather than ticketing for minor equipment issues, some officers are issuing warnings or providing referrals to assistance programs that help drivers repair their vehicles. For example, Indiana’s Criminal Justice Institute runs a social media campaign with images like the one in figure 15 to educate drivers on the need to drive sober.

Figure 15. Indiana Criminal Justice Institute safe driving social media campaign materials



Source: Indiana Criminal Justice Institute, “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over,” State of Indiana, accessed July 30, 2025, https://www.in.gov/cji/traffic-safety/information-for-law-enforcement/marketing-materials/#Drive_Sober_or_Get_Pulled_Over.

62. “Governors Highway Safety Association Report Shows Benefits of Traffic Safety Cameras,” Roads & Bridges, last modified December 11, 2023, <https://www.roadbridges.com/road-traffic-safety/news/33016192/governors-highway-safety-administration-report-shows-benefits-of-traffic-safety-cameras>.

4. Employing professional staff and partnering with community-based organizations

Some jurisdictions have created nonpolice response teams or partnered with community-based organizations to handle minor equipment issues or registration compliance. For example, North Carolina allows civilian police department employees to respond to minor traffic issues following the passage of a new law in 2023.⁶³ As highlighted in PERF's report, *Embracing Civilianization*,⁶⁴ civilian traffic investigators "respond to non-emergency traffic issues like road closures, fender benders, traffic direction, property damage—only vehicle crashes, and stranded motorists." And in Philadelphia, civilian public safety officers will be tasked with "directing traffic, writing tickets, and ordering abandoned vehicles removed from city streets."⁶⁵ "The difference between these positions and police officers is that they won't carry a gun, wear an officer's uniform, or drive a police vehicle. Instead, they'll be driving a specific traffic investigator truck that has emergency lights on the top."⁶⁶

In addition to employing professional staff, some police agencies are developing partnerships with community-based organizations to help vehicle owners repair broken equipment that could otherwise lead to traffic citations and repair orders. For example, the Saint Paul (Minnesota) Police Department—in conjunction with a local nonprofit—has begun hosting "Project Self Stop," a program under which drivers can receive vouchers to pay for broken equipment like headlights, brake lights, and turn indicators.⁶⁷ This partnership—an offshoot of Lights On!, which originated in Minneapolis and expanded to 173 agencies in 23 states in seven years before it suspended operations due to funding challenges⁶⁸—builds community goodwill, promotes traffic safety, and reduces the need for police officers to stop motorists for minor vehicle equipment violations.

63. Jennifer Roberts, "New N.C. Law Allows Trained Civilians to Investigate Traffic Crashes," Spectrum News, last modified July 21, 2023, <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nc/charlotte/news/2023/07/21/new-law-permitting-trained-civilians-to-investigate-traffic-collisions->.

64. PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), *Embracing Civilianization: Integrating Professional Staff to Advance Modern Policing* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2024), <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/Civilianization.pdf>.

65. Tom MacDonald, "New Philly Public Safety Enforcement Officers Sworn In," WHYY, last modified March 10, 2023, <https://whyy.org/articles/philadelphia-public-safety-enforcement-officers-first-group/>.

66. Maria DeBone, "Greensboro Drivers Will Start to See Civilian Traffic Investigators on the Roads," WXII, last modified April 8, 2024, <https://www.wxii12.com/article/greensboro-drivers-will-start-to-see-civilian-traffic-investigators-on-the-roads/60399602>.

67. Feven Gerezgiher, "Aiming to Avoid Unnecessary Traffic Stops, St. Paul Cops Offer Taillight Vouchers," MPR News, last modified December 10, 2023, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2023/12/09/aiming-to-avoid-unnecessary-traffic-stops-cops-offer-taillight-vouchers>.

68. "Lights On!," Microgrants, accessed August 15, 2025, <https://lightsonus.org/>.

Law enforcement in Washington State resists efforts to restrict traffic stops

For three years, proponents of “Traffic Safety for All” legislation in Washington State have met staunch resistance from law enforcement officials. Describing the bill as posing a Catch-22 scenario, Steve Strachan, Executive Director of the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, pledges to fight the bill’s passage each time its advocates bring it before the general assembly:

“We view it as forbidding the police from policing. One reason we oppose the bill is that it phrases the law in such a way that you can’t make a stop for certain equipment and registration violations unless the officer deems it to be a public safety threat. In our opinion, this sets up officers to fail no matter what they do. If they stop the vehicle under the idea this is a public safety threat, they’re exposing themselves to potential civil litigation. But if they don’t stop the vehicle and something bad happens, then they also potentially have civil liability.”



Steve Strachan

If passed, the law would bar police officers “from stopping drivers solely for nonmoving violations, like expired tabs or a broken headlights. . . . Officers could still pull people over for—among other reasons—any criminal offense, not wearing a seat belt, not having license plates, or having a registration that expired more than a year ago.”*

* Jake Goldstein-Street, “Washington Bill Would Set New Limits on When Police Can Stop Drivers,” *Washington State Standard*, February 10, 2025, <https://washingtonstatestandard.com/2025/02/10/wa-bill-would-set-new-limits-on-when-police-can-stop-drivers/>.



Automated Traffic Enforcement and Artificial Intelligence



Faced with staffing shortages, police departments and municipalities have turned to automated traffic enforcement to conserve limited resources, enabling them to respond more effectively to calls for service. Technology, such as red-light cameras and speed enforcement cameras, can monitor roadways for compliance with traffic laws. These cameras typically take a photo of the driver's vehicle and license plate, which a police officer then reviews and endorses before a citation is issued and mailed to the vehicle's registered owner.



"I dream of more technology and less person-to-person engagement for traffic stops because of limited staff resources, the frequent lack of connection to expressed safety issues, and the opportunity for things to just go wrong (we have a large number of fatal interactions as demonstration of this) and cause harm to the public and cops."

— Christine Cole, Senior Advisor, 21CP Solutions and former executive director of the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management at Harvard University

In Baltimore, Maryland, where the city began building out its network of more than 150 speed and red-light cameras in 2019, the number of traffic crashes decreased by approximately 30 percent between January 2021 and July 2025.⁶⁹ And while there were 34 fatal crashes in the first seven months of 2024, only eight occurred through mid-August 2025—a 76 percent decrease. Notably, these decreases occurred as the speed and red-light cameras issued fewer citations over time.⁷⁰

Speed and red-light cameras

Researchers have hailed these innovations as an effective solution for reducing risky behaviors associated with traffic fatalities.⁷¹ A study of red-light cameras in Arlington, Virginia, published in the *Journal of Safety Research* found a reduction in red-light running at intersections equipped with red-light cameras when compared to intersections without cameras.⁷² Similarly, a speed camera study conducted in Philadelphia and published in the *Transportation Research Record* showed that a main thoroughfare with speed enforcement cameras installed had a reduction in crashes, injuries, and fatalities, with “decreases . . . on the high end of what is found in the academic literature on speed cameras”⁷³ (though the authors generally cite literature from outside the United States and that is between 5 and 30 years old).

Notwithstanding the criticism that automated enforcement cameras prioritize revenue generation over public safety,⁷⁴ Richard Retting of the National Academies Transportation Research Board believes speed cameras should be among the options considered when crafting a plan to reduce the frequency and severity of traffic crashes:

“Speed cameras are a vaccine in the sense that if you put one at a location and publicize that it’s there, you can assume there will be about a 90 percent reduction in speeding. The certainty of speed reduction is high because people don’t want to get tickets; and if there is a guarantee of a ticket, there is an immediate effect on compliance. This has been the result of studies I’ve done [on all types of roadways], not just in school zones and residential communities. [For example,] I studied the 101 Freeway in Scottsdale, Arizona, where the speed limit was 65 miles an hour. The percentage of drivers going 75 or higher was reduced by 90 percent through the use of speed cameras.”

69. Matthew Schumer, “Speed Cameras across Baltimore are Issuing Fewer Tickets. Is That a Bad Thing?” *The Baltimore Sun*, August 13, 2025, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2025/08/13/speed-cameras-baltimore-fewer-tickets/>.

70. Schumer, “Speed Cameras across Baltimore” (see note 69).

71. “Governors Highway Safety Association Report Shows Benefits of Traffic Safety Cameras,” *Roads & Bridges*, last modified December 11, 2023, <https://www.roadsbridges.com/road-traffic-safety/news/33016192/governors-highway-safety-administration-report-shows-benefits-of-traffic-safety-cameras>.

72. Anne T. McCartt and Wen Hu, “Effects of Red Light Camera Enforcement on Red Light Violations in Arlington County, Virginia,” *Journal of Safety Research* 48 (February 2014), 57–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2013.12.001>.

73. Erick Guerra et al., “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Speed Cameras on Philadelphia’s Roosevelt Boulevard,” *Transportation Research Record* 2678, no. 9 (2024): 452–461, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03611981241230320>.

74. Maya Fegan, “Speeding into the Future: The Pitfalls of Automated Traffic Enforcement,” *Berkeley Journal of Criminal Law*, last modified April 15, 2021, <https://www.bjcl.org/blog/speeding-into-the-future-the-pitfalls-of-automated-traffic-enforcement>.



Challenges with cameras

While researchers believe this technology is effective in reducing crashes, it is not without its challenges. Opponents of automated enforcement systems argue that the cameras are money grabs in the guise of public safety, deny motorists the right to due process, and issue fines disproportionate to the safety risk. As a result, state legislatures in Maine, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin have prohibited speed cameras.⁷⁵

Another challenge of automated enforcement systems is authorities' limited ability to collect fines and hold repeat violators accountable. According to Assistant Chief Carlos Heraud of the Washington (D.C.) Metropolitan Police Department:

"D.C. has the most automated traffic enforcement cameras per street model of any jurisdiction. What we're seeing is an enormous number of tickets associated with specific vehicles. The problem is there is really no mechanism to enforce the violations, especially because there's not reciprocity with Maryland and Virginia. So if you're a D.C. resident, you can't re-register your vehicle if you have outstanding tickets, but there is no enforcement mechanism for vehicles registered in Maryland and Virginia, which double our vehicle traffic on workdays."

75. "Traffic Safety Review: State Speed and Red-Light Camera Laws and Programs," National Council of State Legislatures, last modified September 26, 2022, <https://www.ncsl.org/transportation/traffic-safety-review-state-speed-and-red-light-camera-laws-and-programs#>.

And in Virginia, while authorities can deploy red-light cameras in any location, they can use speed cameras only in school zones.⁷⁶ This restriction limits traffic engineers' and law enforcement's ability to influence drivers' risky behaviors outside school zones, where speed cameras could be just as effective at reducing the frequency and seriousness of crashes. By comparison, Colorado has progressively expanded the use of Automated Vehicle Identification Systems (AVIS) from school zones, neighborhoods, roads that border parks, and construction zones to any highway designated as a "speed corridor."⁷⁷

The future of traffic enforcement technology

Some meeting participants were optimistic that technology will be able to branch into areas beyond speed and red-light enforcement. This optimism has already been realized in South Australia, where cameras have captured drivers with double-fisted distractions—a burger or beverage in one hand and a cell phone in the other, with neither hand on the wheel. Given that distracted driving was one of three leading causes of 847 serious crashes in 2024, South Australian Police are sharing these incriminating images with the public to discourage distracted driving and reduce the frequency and seriousness of crashes.⁷⁸

In the United States, "Many manufacturers are [also] working on driver monitoring systems that can detect impairment," according to Dr. Jeffrey Michael of Johns Hopkins University. "This is really important. Impaired driving is very high—alcohol impaired driving in particular—and we have to recognize it is a very difficult problem to solve when 10 percent of the population has alcohol use disorder, meaning they're not in control, and the top 10 percent of consumers are consuming 60 percent of the alcohol."

A new Virginia statute, effective July 1, 2026, will give judges the discretion to require reckless drivers to use speed-limiting technology on their vehicles.⁷⁹ Like ignition interlocks, "which use breathalyzers to prevent people from starting a car when their blood alcohol hits a certain threshold,"⁸⁰ "speed governors" or "intelligent speed assistance devices" are meant to curb the behaviors of dangerous drivers by setting a maximum speed the driver cannot exceed.⁸¹



76. "Use of Photo Speed Monitoring Devices in Highway Work Zones, School Crossing Zones, and High-Risk Intersection Segments; Civil Penalty," Va. Code. Ann. § 46.2-882.1. (2025), <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title46.2/chapter8/section46.2-882.1/>.

77. Next 9News, "More Cities Begin Using Speed Radar Cameras to Write Tickets After Change to Colorado Law," YouTube, November 13, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPOoO0r7pqQ&t=12>.

78. Alana Calvert, "SA Police's Warning to Distracted Drivers After 17 Lives Lost on Roads This Year So Far," ABC Australia, last modified February 23, 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-02-23/sa-police-distracted-drivers-mobile-cameras-detection-road-toll/104971102>.

79. Jared Brey, "Vehicle Speed-Limiting Technology Gets a Foothold in State Law," Governing, April 11, 2025, <https://www.governing.com/transportation/vehicle-speed-limiting-technology-gets-a-foothold-in-state-law>.

80. Brey, "Vehicle Speed-Limiting Technology" (see note 79).

81. Brey, "Vehicle Speed-Limiting Technology" (see note 79).

Overcoming Internal Challenges



Getting police officers to re-engage in traffic enforcement has proven to be more challenging than some police leaders may have expected. Because agencies commonly ordered police officers to maintain social distance at the beginning of the pandemic, many newer officers have not acquired the same level of knowledge and skills to conduct traffic enforcement as their more experienced colleagues (see sidebar “How the Fairfax County PD re-embraced traffic enforcement” on page 48). In addition, months of social unrest and calls for policing reform caused some veteran officers to disengage in proactive enforcement to reduce the risk of confrontation that might have led to complaints. Against this backdrop, meeting attendees discussed the strategies their agencies are using to create officer buy-in for conducting traffic enforcement.

Every officer is a traffic officer

When Chief Shahram Fard took over the Falls Church (Virginia) Police Department in 2024, he found traffic enforcement had dropped by 77.5 percent. He therefore made it a priority to support and educate his officers about the importance of conducting traffic enforcement to fulfill a wide range of public safety responsibilities:

“Over that period, a mix of legislative changes and broader concerns about police reform and potential legal risks for officers in use-of-force situations, made many officers adopt a more cautious approach and ended up in less traffic stops. We’ve since implemented data-driven strategies to guide our traffic safety goals, and we encourage and support officers to be proactive and engage in traffic enforcement. Whether or not a citation is issued is unimportant; what’s important is making sure officers are visible on the roadways, they’re stopping violators, and they’re using those interactions to engage and educate the community. Our goal is to shift the mindset of those officers who think ‘traffic is not my thing’ to recognize that traffic safety is a core quality-of-life issue—on par with addressing crime and disorder.”

Make traffic enforcement personal

When the Yakima Police Department recognized a change in officers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding traffic enforcement were needed, the leadership team developed a messaging strategy. Lieutenant Ira Cavin explained the strategy this way:

"We call a traffic stop a traffic contact. The reason we call it a contact instead of a stop is because we don't want to set a quota for issuing traffic tickets. We tell the officers, 'We want you to [make] four [traffic contacts] a day and take enforcement action when you feel it is appropriate on collision-causing violations such as speed, distracted driving, and impaired driving.'

"We sold it to the officers by going to every shift's roll call. I showed them the statistics. I showed the serious increase in fatal and serious injury crashes that we had. And then I told them, 'Your family has to drive through this community—your kids, your [spouse], or you could be the victim of one of these incidents. Most of our families are not going to be victims of drug or gang violence, but you can have a direct impact on your own safety as well as your family's safety by helping us reduce these numbers."

Use data to explain why traffic enforcement is important

Colonel Tim Cameron of the Wyoming Highway Patrol emphasizes that improvements in public safety numbers are much more important than increases in tickets written.

"We simply influence our troopers by providing them data and showing them how they can save lives. We track not only where the crashes are happening, but the causative factors involved in those crashes because we're trying to pinpoint where [they should deploy] and what they [should be] looking for. **I always make the important distinction [that] outputs don't outweigh outcomes, with outputs being the numbers, citations, warnings, and so on, [and the outcomes being reductions in DULs, traffic crashes, and traffic fatalities]."**

But he also noted outputs should not be dismissed. "I think they're indicative of whether you have a problem," he said. "For example, if your agency, all of a sudden, is writing 10 times more warnings than citations, [it could be] because some of the newer police officers don't want to go to court for whatever reason."

Leverage local media to tell your story

The Sacramento (California) Police Department gives special attention to traffic safety on Tuesdays. Its focus, however, is as internal as it is external. **"Traffic Tip Tuesdays" are one-minute segments played each week on social media and a local news station** (see figure 16 on page 47). In addition to highlighting the department's traffic enforcement efforts for the community, Sergeant Kenneth Collier says, **the segments have been instrumental in "educating our officers about how important it is to do traffic enforcement. There's this level of excitement that we've recently created about doing traffic once again."**

Figure 16. “Traffic Tip Tuesdays” in the Sacramento Police Department reinforce the importance of officers stopping motorists who commit traffic violations



Source: Lisa Gonzalez, “Tuesday Traffic Tips: Know the Rules about Cellphones and Driving,” KCRA 3 News, Last modified November 15, 2022, <https://www.kcra.com/article/tuesday-traffic-tips-know-the-rules-about-cellphones-and-driving/41970201>.

Invite officers to see how commanders make decisions

To break down barriers about how critical incidents are evaluated and policy and training decisions are made, the Tulsa (Oklahoma) Police Department invites officers to attend the department’s Pursuit Review Board, Collision Review Board, and Use of Force Review Board—“the boards that review the results of officers doing proactive enforcement,” according to Major Matt McCord. This is a novel approach to creating a culture where officers feel confident taking enforcement action. The message, said McCord, is “‘Come see what we’re doing.’ This isn’t a totalitarian regime. We have officer representatives there that can explain why we’re making the decisions that we are, and we’ve also begun inviting the specific chain of command [of the officer involved], because you want the chain of command to take responsibility for the recommendations.”

How the Fairfax County PD re-embraced traffic enforcement

“We use a community engagement tool to determine the most important public safety issues to our residents,” says Assistant Chief Bob Blakley of the Fairfax County (Virginia) Police Department. “Theft ranks first; traffic safety ranks second, with 30 percent of respondents indicating traffic safety is their primary concern. The inboxes of our station commanders are typically filled with complaints about stop sign runners or speeders in the neighborhood, and our HOA meetings are filled with people asking for speed bumps and stop signs.

“We went from writing 115,000 tickets in 2019 to 30,000 in 2020. In doing this, we onboarded a generation of what we called ‘COVID cops’ who didn’t know that traffic enforcement should be a priority and how to do it successfully. So, we just kind of started over.



Assistant Chief Bob Blakley

“Just as every Marine is a rifleman, every cop should be a traffic cop. Every cop should be a criminal cop, too, and a steward in the community, and a community police officer, all those things. We went back to the basics and started by explaining why, beginning with an internal messaging drive. We brought in a retired officer whose son was killed in a reckless driving crash and filmed a video. We reminded our cops that two of our six line-of-duty deaths in our department’s history were traffic crashes. We showed them videos of some crashes, including one from where we had an officer who was struck on a traffic stop by a car going 128 miles an hour.* We made that a national news story as long as we could. . . . It drove the point home that this is super important to all of us, so we taught them why.

“Then we directed our officers’ efforts. We taught them some of those old school selective enforcement initiatives where we said, ‘Hey, the Fairfax County Parkway has three of our top 10 most serious crash locations. We are going to do directed patrol initiatives there. You can write a report, you can write a ticket, you can write a warning, you can write a field contact.’ It’s not about quotas, we said. We’re not looking for tickets, we’re looking to change behavior that causes deaths.

“And we created a little healthy competition by producing daily activity reports and posting them on the wall, where everyone could see whose squad was in the lead. We created some awards and recognized cops for their good work. Basically, we reinforced the message over and over until traffic safety became a part of our culture again. When we started this strategy, we decreased our fatal crashes by about 60 percent and we went from 30,000 tickets to almost 70,000 with an additional 30,000 warnings or so.



“I believe we hear glowing reviews as a result. Someone just posted a video on Twitter of one of our cops stopping someone for going 110 miles an hour on Route 28—a 55 mile-an-hour road. And it’ll get lots of reviews.

“The most important thing I can say is to follow the tenets of procedural justice: The interaction is more important than the outcome. If we have our cops out there screaming at people and jerking them out of the car because they didn’t get their registration card fast enough, we’ll lose the initiative. We tell our cops to engage in meaningful enforcement. We don’t want you to go sit at a four-way stop and try to run up your stats so the numbers look good. We don’t care. What we care about is for you to observe dangerous driving behaviors, stop a vehicle, have a conversation with somebody, and decide then what the appropriate outcome is based on that conversation, whether it’s a ticket or a warning.”

* Mike Murillo, “Wild Car Crash Caught on Fairfax Police Dash Cam Video; Officer Barely Escapes,” WTOP, last modified May 3, 2023, <https://wtop.com/fairfax-county/2023/05/police-close-call-for-officer-after-speeding-teen-driver-loses-control-of-car-in-fairfax-co/>.





Autonomous Vehicles

One must look no further than Oprah Winfrey's July 2025 book club selection to appreciate the weighty implications of autonomous vehicles (AV). *Culpability*, by Bruce Holsinger, contemplates who is responsible for a fatal car crash.⁸² Was it the 17-year-old boy seated behind the wheel of a self-driving minivan? Could it have been the boy's father, who grabbed the wheel when he saw an oncoming car veer toward the center line? Was it the fault of the elderly driver of the other car, or could it have been a malfunction of the AV itself?

Are AVs safe?

Research comparing the safety profiles of AVs to those of human-controlled vehicles is scarce. One study suggests vehicle crashes are less likely with AVs than with human-controlled vehicles,⁸³ yet crashes of AVs occur more frequently during dawn and dusk conditions and while turning than human-controlled cars.⁸⁴

At PERF's 2025 Annual Meeting in Nashville, Chief Lisa Davis of the Austin (Texas) Police Department said her agency hasn't experienced significant problems with AVs, issuing only three citations for traffic violations since the program began in July 2024. However, she characterized AVs as exhibiting "opportunistic behavior," such as "going through a yellow light if no one is there rather than stopping on a dime."

Chief Davis also noted, "it can take up to 45 minutes for a representative to show up at an incident involving one of their vehicles," the AVs are known to "just stop in the middle of an intersection," and her department "once had to rescue somebody when the car locked its doors and the passenger couldn't get out."

82. Ron Charles, "Oprah's Book Club Pick 'Culpability' Taps Into Our AI Anxiety," *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/books/2025/07/08/culpability-bruce-holsinger-review/>.

83. Mohamed Abdel-Aty and Shengxuan Ding, "A Matched Case-Control Analysis of Autonomous vs Human-Driven Vehicle Accidents," *Nature Communications* 15, no. 1 (2024), 4931, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-48526-4>.

84. Abdel-Aty and Ding, "A Matched Case-Control Analysis" (see note 83).

Initially reluctant to ride in an AV, Brown University Professor and former Burlington (Vermont) Police Chief Brandon del Pozo quickly came to see this mode of transportation in a new light:

“After two minutes of riding in one, I thought, not only is this the future of taxis, this is the future of driving. We’ve all seen drivers hit a parked police car, strike a kid running out into traffic, speed through a construction zone, or drive the wrong way in traffic. Whereas each human has to learn all the rules of the road for the first time—for example, to yield to emergency vehicles by pulling over to the right—autonomous vehicles are constantly learning and their programmers will implement these lessons learned on the entire fleet at once. And they don’t get road rage and they’re never in a hurry. All the things that make humans bad drivers can be programmed and accounted for in autonomous vehicles.”

Police Interactions with AVs

Police departments nationwide are increasingly confronted with how to respond to and interact with AVs. Absent federal regulations, states and local governments are taking the lead in establishing rules for AVs on city streets. Law enforcement agencies are also coordinating their efforts to respond to incidents involving AVs.

At PERF’s traffic meeting in Virginia, attendees from Los Angeles and San Francisco shared their experiences with the rollout of AVs in their cities. And shortly after the meeting, PERF spoke with police in Phoenix, Arizona, and with officials in Washington, D.C., to learn about how they have been working with this new technology and how they are preparing to introduce AVs to the streets of the nation’s capital.

California

California has served as an early testing ground for how municipalities manage AVs. With the use of a smart phone app, ride-share passengers have been able to book AVs on the streets of San Francisco since 2022 and Los Angeles since 2024.

Commander Nicole Jones bluntly described the San Francisco Police Department, the first law enforcement agency to oversee the integration of AVs onto a city’s roadways, as a “test dummy” for AV companies. That department’s experience offers a clear view of the challenges police departments are likely to encounter when AVs arrive in their jurisdictions.

AVs in motorcades and construction zones

While AVs appear to be generally less prone to crashes than standard ride-share vehicles, they can still cause problems during special events. Motorcades and construction zones can be especially difficult, as they require quick reactions to unpredictable changes to the city’s traffic map, which the computers in the AVs update as continuously as possible. Geofencing, which restricts specific streets or zones from traffic, can help, but it is hard to maintain its accuracy and currency in frequently changing road conditions. Commander Jones highlighted an incident involving the then–vice president’s motorcade in San Francisco, when an AV entered a restricted zone: “The department was able to work with the AV company to come to a safe resolution. Our motorcycle officers performed a vehicle takeover, got in the car, and then received permission from the [company’s] remote operator to move the car manually.”

Issuing citations to AVs

An emerging concern is how to issue citations for AVs. Because there is no driver, and police officers can't issue a citation directly to the vehicle, California is creating a regulatory framework that allows citations to be issued directly to the company. A bill passed in 2024 requires AV companies to maintain an emergency hotline for police, permits police to issue traffic citations directly to AV companies, and authorizes first responders to issue emergency geofencing orders.⁸⁵



Importance of quality relationships with AV companies

Building relationships with AV companies is crucial for safe and smooth operations. In fact, it's common for AV companies to hire a public safety liaison—often a retired law enforcement officer—to act as a bridge between the company and local governments. These advisors are vital in resolving issues that come up with AVs. Such relationships are not only essential but also comforting, as someone with law enforcement experience can communicate concerns and problem-solve between the agency and AV company.

Commander Craig Valenzuela of the Los Angeles Police Department highlighted his experience working with a public safety liaison from an AV company: "He was a former California Highway Patrol captain. My partnership with him was incredibly important. If I called and I needed an answer he picked up right away."

Commander Valenzuela also expressed concern about the complexity of the liaison role as more companies establish a presence in the same jurisdiction. "It's pretty easy right now," he said, "because I have one point of contact with only one company. But as these companies proliferate, I think we need to push them to create one set of standards and one call center. We don't want to call multiple companies to set up geofences; we don't want to follow different protocols when moving vehicles or resolving emergencies."

Phoenix, Arizona

As another early adopter of AVs, Phoenix has had to address many issues on the fly. Because of this experience, Commander David Seitter of the Phoenix Police Department stressed the importance of AV companies providing training to police officers on how to operate them and how to contact emergency dispatch services for assistance.

85. "Autonomous Vehicles," Cal. Veh. Code 38750–38755 (2024), https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=VEH§ionNum=38750.

Geofencing

The most challenging issue for the Phoenix Police Department has been geofencing. With two large sports arenas that often require road closures and specific traffic patterns, the department must call the AV company before each sporting event to set up the proper geofencing, a process Commander Seitter said is tedious and burdensome. He further noted that the AVs have difficulty detecting changing road conditions. For instance, if a police officer redirects traffic or places traffic cones on the roadway, the AVs sometimes struggle to navigate these situations because the car does not know the difference between an ordinary obstacle (such as a pothole or something dropped from the back of a delivery truck) and an official one.

Need for standardization

Commander Seitter emphasized the need for uniform standards and protocols when interacting with AV companies, including procedures for contacting company dispatchers and moving AVs that are blocking roadways. Although the department has successfully established these protocols with the one company currently operating in Phoenix, there are serious concerns about having to do this repeatedly as additional companies make their way into the market. Phoenix Police Department officials wonder, will police officers have to learn how to operate a new platform with each company? Will officers have to contact liaisons or dispatchers from multiple companies to update geofencing?

Washington, D.C.

Without any commercial AVs currently licensed to operate in Washington, D.C., the city has the time to deliberately and methodically craft a regulatory regime for these companies to operate. A prominent challenge D.C. faces is the fact that some local streets are managed by the city, while others are overseen by the federal government, including agencies like the U.S. Capitol Police, U.S. Park Police, and U.S. Secret Service. This diffused responsibility requires the involvement of all stakeholders to ensure AVs can access public streets under the jurisdiction of different authorities.

Recommendations for the rollout of AVs

Rick Birt, Director of the D.C. Office of Highway Safety, provided the following recommendations for jurisdictions when preparing for the rollout of AVs:

- Coordinate and plan with all stakeholders. Law enforcement, engineering, and transportation should all have a seat at the table.
- Develop a permitting and safety structure all AV companies must meet before being authorized to operate.
- Require companies to adapt to the jurisdiction's requirements (not the other way around) to ensure consistent regulatory practices.
- Think proactively about what law enforcement needs to know when interacting with AVs.
- Ensure vendors deliver training for all law enforcement personnel before operations begin. This preparation will reduce challenges in the field during rollout.



What's next?

As for what's next in the way of automated conveyances, Los Angeles Police Department Chief Jim McDonnell called attention to the growing presence of robots. "It's not unusual," he said, "to be in West Hollywood or Beverly Hills and see 10 or 12 robots on the sidewalk delivering food. You feel like you're in the Jetsons," he quipped, referring to the cartoon that originally aired on television in the 1960s.

With the emerging market for AVs and food-delivering robots, and the expanded use of drones for commercial and government purposes, the "Orbit City" of 2062 envisioned in *The Jetsons* no longer seems quite so fantastical.





Street Takeovers

“Street takeovers” is an umbrella term this report uses to refer to events variously known as “car meetups,” “sideshows,” and “street races.” A street takeover happens when a large group of motorists gathers their cars, motorcycles, or e-bikes at a section of roadway to drag race, block traffic, or display their vehicles’ power and design to onlookers. These street takeovers frustrate—and sometimes terrify—other motorists and pose a serious challenge to law enforcement. Although street takeovers are not a new cultural phenomenon—they are featured in 1970s film classics like *Grease* and *American Graffiti* as well as more current media like the video game series *Grand Theft Auto* (which depicts violence and chaos in vehicles)—police leaders report they became more common during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to grow in size, frequency, and sophistication, often turning out to be a nexus to more serious crime. As an example of one city’s experience, data from the Los Angeles Police Department showed a 49 percent increase in street races, 2 percent increase in street takeovers, 49 percent increase in speed contests, and 138 percent increase in reckless driving between 2023 and 2024.⁸⁶

A nationwide problem

Street takeovers are a persistent issue nationwide. Although national statistics on street takeovers are not available, media coverage indicates they are a problem for many jurisdictions. In fact, five of the police chiefs who serve (or served) on PERF’s board of directors—Sacramento (California) Chief Kathy Lester, Metropolitan Nashville (Tennessee) Chief John Drake, Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Chief Johnny Jennings, Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) Commissioner Kevin Bethel, and St. Louis (Missouri) Metropolitan Chief Robert Tracy—discussed the “menacing problem” of street takeovers in their jurisdictions with PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler in December 2024 (see sidebar on page 58–59).

86. Dominic H. Choi, Chief, Los Angeles Police Department, “Reviewing Existing Laws Designed to Control Street Racing and Takeovers and Determine Their Efficacy,” memorandum to the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners, June 12, 2024, https://www.lapdpolicecom.lacity.org/061824/BPC_24-112.pdf.

Police chiefs discuss their responses to street takeovers

“We’ve seen these groups of hundreds of people doing really dangerous stuff. And it’s super dangerous for the cops. These happen in the middle of the night, and I have 30 to 40 cops on the graveyard shift. Even that many cops couldn’t handle a sideshow of 400 people, because we’ll get surrounded. We’ve had [community members] involved when they inadvertently drive into these things. And we had two homicides related to a sideshow in September [2024].”

— **Sacramento Chief Kathy Lester**



“Most of these happen on weekends. We sometimes know when and where. We send a bunch of cars, but we’ll provide them an avenue of escape. We try to arrest the main organizers and make as many traffic stops as we can as they disperse. But if you have 400 or 500 cars and 30 or 40 officers, that’s an officer safety issue. So we try to be strategic in dealing with that. We also work with the district attorney, who has assigned a prosecutor to the Street Race Initiative.”

— **Metropolitan Nashville Chief John Drake**



“At one point in 2020 and 2021, it was happening constantly. We did an operation that lasted several months and, at the end of it, confiscated about 60 cars and made several arrests. We worked with the district attorney’s office, and it worked really well. Even though we had to give some cars back after the adjudication of their charges, we still kept those cars for months, and it was a hardship for them. Some of them were kids who had their parents’ cars, and that was tough, but your kid shouldn’t be out racing your vehicle.”

— **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Chief Johnny Jennings**



“We run a detail every Friday and Saturday night, and sometimes Sunday, with a package of about 40 officers who are prepared to respond to a car meetup. We also do ATV details. I have about 40 motorbikes I use for that, and that’s been going very well for us. We put [together] a shooting investigation group—some of our most seasoned investigators—on these cases. They started to uncover something we hadn’t recognized, which is that organizers were flying drones overhead and making money by putting the footage online.



“We used the technology we normally use for shootings or homicides to identify every phone and every car we could. Even if officers couldn’t stop everyone, they were filming them. We worked with the state police to put every car into our system, so it flagged every time a cop or trooper stopped one in Pennsylvania. And it went as far as Baltimore and all the way up into New York. We found organizers. And we did press conferences to say we locked them up.”

— Philadelphia Commissioner Kevin Bethel

“We use our intel unit to track these individuals with open-source information and charge them. We use spike strips, we impound vehicles, and we take these charges seriously.



“We’re out looking for this, and we’re very aware of the spots where they like to go. . . . They want to get a shot under the Arch from a distance. That’s a hit on social media. When we see them stage up, we immediately respond with these cruising details. We have to coordinate with the other municipalities, the county, and the state, because when we take these actions, it’s pushed out to other areas. So we’re communicating and making sure the other jurisdictions are not surprised.”

— St. Louis Metropolitan
Chief Robert Tracy

Source: Chuck Wexler, “Street Takeovers Are a National Problem,” Trending, last modified December 7, 2024, <https://www.policeforum.org/trending7dec24>.

Lieutenant Craig Browning of the Louisville (Kentucky) Metropolitan Police Department captured the successes and challenges many of the attendees at PERF's traffic meeting have experienced in addressing this issue.

"We had our first really big issues with street racing side shows in 2022, when they shut down a portion of the interstate that runs next to our international airport, which is one of the main arteries around Louisville. This is not only a major inconvenience for all motorists, but if trucks are held up in traffic at all, it costs them money. Months later, they were in a less affluent part of town, took over an intersection, and [delayed] three or four ambulances that were trying to get patients to the level one trauma center.

"The issue then flipped, and we had the political might to pass an ordinance in Louisville that allows police to seize a vehicle for six months for a first offense with \$1,000 fine, or a year for a second offense with a \$2,000 fine. The ordinance applies to the vehicles that are doing the burnouts as well as those that are blocking roads for the exhibition to occur."

Strategies and tactics to address the problem

To address the problem of street takeovers, police agencies are doing everything from deploying saturated patrols and monitoring social media to conducting in-depth follow-up investigations and lobbying for legislative changes.

Deploying saturated patrols

The large number of participants in a typical street takeover and the level of disobedience they often display are beyond the capability of many individual patrol personnel to handle in the context of their regular duties. As a result, many law enforcement agencies have created specially trained enforcement teams to deter and disrupt street takeovers. In San Francisco, for example, Commander Nicole Jones said a designated team of officers, led by a lieutenant, deploys from their patrol assignments when a street takeover comes to their attention.

Monitoring social media

Not every enforcement operation has to be elaborate. On one occasion, the Louisville Metropolitan Police Department thwarted a street takeover with a "ghost car." According to Lieutenant Browning, "Our real-time crime center was monitoring social media and learned the [car clubs] were planning to rally at a boat ramp. We took a marked car that nobody was driving and parked it there. That solved the problem for the night."

Conducting follow-up investigations

Commander Jones said San Francisco has so many street takeovers that in addition to a designated patrol team that diverts its attention to disrupt them, her department now has "a dedicated team that does nothing but the investigative follow-up to these events."

Given the serious crimes in which many street takeover participants are involved, conducting follow-up investigations is critical. "It's not just this innocent takeover with kids blowing off steam," according to Commander Craig Valenzuela. "Within these car clubs there's a criminal element. It's not just the street takeovers; it's not just the side shows; it's not just the street racing. We see street takeovers that devolve into looting of businesses. We've also seen mail theft and check washing. There are stolen guns and human trafficking—all these other criminal tentacles we find."

From car meetups to a criminal enterprise

"There is an organized criminal element that has happened because of really good networking. Those [who participate in street takeovers] have a social media connection, they have a communication platform connection, and then they're meeting in public. That's how this has grown into an enterprise of human trafficking and running guns and drugs. They bolstered their clientele because they're interacting with anywhere from 200 to 1,000 different people in a single night or a series of consecutive nights."



"One way we investigated these crews was through an undercover officer. He went undercover for essentially two years as a photographer. That's how he was able to get into different social media platforms. He was out there taking photographs and posting them to his Instagram page, and he used every single one of those photos as evidence later on. This is how we got off the ground with intel. Essentially, he was the eyes on the ground for us. We had a covert radio system for him to use, and he would call out all kinds of things to us, like license plates and vehicle descriptions. And then we would use our air assets or regional assets to help with the takedowns."

*— Sergeant Kenneth Collier,
Sacramento (California) Police Department*

Lobbying for legislative change

Although time consuming to enact, some states and local jurisdictions have found bipartisan support for legislation that empowers law enforcement to curtail street takeovers by citing and arresting participants and seizing their vehicles.

California

For example, in 2024, California passed four new statutes to give law enforcement agencies more power to prevent and respond to street takeovers. One statute standardizes existing language to clarify that a vehicle “sideshow” is also known as a “street takeover.” A second statute allows a law enforcement officer to seize a vehicle used to obstruct a roadway for a street takeover or race without having to take the driver into custody. A third statute expands existing law to allow a law enforcement officer to seize and impound a vehicle for up to 30 days if the officer determines the vehicle was used for a race or speed exhibition in an off-street parking facility. And a fourth statute allows law enforcement, with a warrant or judge’s order, to impound a vehicle suspected of having been used in a street takeover or street race on highways or parking lots.⁸⁷

Tennessee

Tennessee is another state that has taken action to penalize street racing.⁸⁸ The Jacob (Jake) T. Barnhardt Act, passed in honor of a 34-year-old U.S. Army veteran who was killed when a suspected street racer crashed into his car, provided for the creation of a “task force to study and determine best practices for curbing illegal street racing.”⁸⁹ Tennessee has also passed legislation that increases the penalties for street racing. Previously a misdemeanor, street racing is now a felony with a maximum six-year prison sentence.⁹⁰

Virginia

Effective July 1, 2025, Virginia passed a bill outlawing a variety of acts related to street takeovers, including “purposefully slow[ing], stop[ping], or impeded[ing] the movement of traffic” or “spectat[ing] at any race, street takeover, or exhibition.”⁹¹ Major David Hill of the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office praised the law because it empowers police to hold accountable those who contribute significantly to the problem even though they may not be the ones drag racing or performing tricks. “It’s really hard to get to the cars in the middle of a [rally],” Hill said, “but you can definitely get to the people on the outside. If you stop making it a publicly acceptable thing, I think it will have an impact.”

Disincentivizing participation and attendance

Jurisdictions have been both creative and strategic in their response to street takeovers. In San Diego, California, for example, the police department partnered with the district attorney’s office to obtain court orders to destroy two vehicles involved in street takeovers.⁹²

87. Travis Schlepp, “Newsom Signs 4 Bills Aimed at Cracking Down on Street Takeovers, Racing,” KTLA, last modified September 24, 2024, <https://ktla.com/news/california/newsom-signs-4-bills-aimed-at-cracking-down-on-street-takeovers-racing/>.

88. Courtney Allen, “Bill to Make Street Racing a Felony Moves through Capitol,” WSMV, last modified March 12, 2024, <https://www.wsmv.com/2024/03/12/bill-make-street-racing-felony-moves-through-capitol/>.

89. Jacob (Jake) T. Barnhardt Act, Tenn. Pub. Ch. 1058 (2024), <https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/acts/113/pub/pc1058.pdf>.

90. Jordan James, “Gov. Lee Signs Bill Punishing Street Racing into Law,” WSMV, last modified May 24, 2024, <https://www.wsmv.com/2024/05/24/gov-lee-signs-bill-punishing-street-racing-into-law/>.

91. “Exhibition Driving; Impoundment of Motor Vehicle,” Va. Code Ann. § 46.2–867.1 (2025), <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/46.2-867.1/>.

92. Todd Strain, “For First Time in Decades, SDPD Seizes, Destroys Vehicles of Reckless Drivers,” NBC7 San Diego, last modified July 29, 2025, <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/for-first-time-in-decades-sdpd-seizes-destroys-vehicles-of-reckless-drivers/3878713/>.

Meeting participants discussed several other ways in which their agencies work to prevent street takeovers and to discourage both participation in and attendance at events they cannot quash pre-emptively.

Assistant Chief Bob Blakley, Fairfax County Police Department

Assistant Chief Bob Blakley of the Fairfax County (Virginia) Police Department talked about using social media, cooperating with business owners, and enforcing trespassing laws to move sideshow participants off private property and toward public roadways where they can be cited for any moving or equipment violations:

“When we identify plans for a meetup, we immediately mobilize an operation for that evening, which includes our own social media posts. We’ll say, ‘FCPD will be conducting DWI enforcement,’ and then we’ll flood the area with cops. On average, we’ll have about 30 cops devoted to the operation. We’re very aggressive about it. Once that happens, you’ll quickly see them on [social media] changing their meetup location.

“Our district commanders pretty much know all the shopping center owners. And we have private property trespassing and parking defenses . . . the owner of a shopping center can give the police department permission to enforce trespassing after hours. We had one of those last year where one of our officers was surrounded. They beat the vehicle up and ripped the antennas off; we charged five people with abduction—serious felony offenses—using fingerprints getting off the cruiser. We treat it as a violent crime, we immediately show up, walk in and get the manager and say, ‘It’s time to run them off.’

“Once they hit the public highway, if their vehicle is in violation or they commit a moving violation, they’re getting a lot of tickets. If a Honda Civic with a loud exhaust and lowered suspension comes through the vicinity, they’re probably going to have their car on a tow truck with numerous violations. We usually write about 100 tickets for anything: altered suspension, loud exhaust is usually the easiest one to get.”

Commander Nicole Jones, San Francisco Police Department

Commander Jones said her agency cooperates with other departments in neighboring counties:

“This is a huge problem in San Francisco that is getting better. It started around 2019 for us, and we had a huge escalation, especially during COVID. It’s also incredibly dangerous for our officers. They’ve shined lasers in officers’ eyes and fired shots in some of these incidents. There’s a network, especially in the Bay Area, all the way up to Sacramento. So we all talk constantly, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights into the wee hours of Sunday morning. We share the information if we know they’re coming. We’ll send people to the hot spot locations if we know where they’re coming from. So we have a very proactive, preventative approach. But then on the back end, if one does materialize in the city limits, we will take all the evidence that we can get and tow their vehicles with a 30-day hold. San Francisco just passed an ordinance which made participation a misdemeanor. The other thing in the pipeline for us is to activate our drones to collect more intel on the license plates.”

Commander Jones also mentioned the off-label use of Botts' Dots⁹³—better known as raised pavement markers. Botts' Dots are designed to help keep drivers within their lanes by providing tactile and auditory feedback when driven over, but the San Francisco Police Department has found success with them in deterring street takeovers.

Chief Karl Oakman, Kansas City Police Department

Chief Oakman spoke of similar efforts:

"We scrub all the social media sites. When we know an event's happening, there's usually about six locations. We have teams to go to each one to prevent it from happening. Visible presence. And we work with Kansas City, Missouri, tow trucks and other neighboring agencies. We also put down the stop sticks as a preventive measure. And then we have an ordinance where we charge the spectators. Since we started aggressively going after them in the last three years, we haven't seen the violence that we were seeing before."

Major John Webb, Baltimore Police Department

And Major John Webb, Commander of the Special Operations Section with the Baltimore Police Department, described involving other department components to ensure enforcement against street takeovers is both safe and effective:

"Our intel center picks up on when they're going to have them. We put cops down in the areas where we know they're going to be rallying up, and then we use our air assets to surveille them because we don't pursue on the ground. Once we get them to a safe spot, we run LPR cars through there, looking for any stolen tags or other violations."

93. Named after their inventor, Caltrans engineer Elbert Dysart Botts. Caltrans, "What Are Those Little Bumps in between the Lanes on the Freeway?" FAQs, State of California, accessed July 25, 2025, <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/public-affairs/faqs#accordion-faq-63-little-bumpsB5EE34DB>.



10 Recommendations to Promote Traffic Safety

1. Analyze data to identify crash hot spots and deploy enforcement resources.

Much like using data—calls for service, crime incidents, community complaints, wanted persons, and recidivist offenders—to identify crime hot spots for making deployment decisions, departments should analyze traffic crash data, community complaints, and speed studies to determine where traffic enforcement should be conducted. Locations with the most crashes, serious injuries, and fatalities should be prioritized for enforcement and the implementation of other Vision Zero strategies, and data should be routinely monitored to assess the effectiveness of deployment tactics and to determine where officers should be deployed next. Ongoing data analysis is also essential for optimizing proactive enforcement time of limited personnel resources during staffing shortages.

2. Educate the community about the purpose of traffic enforcement.

Police chiefs consistently report that traffic-related issues are among community members' top complaints. Whether for speeding, double-parking, running stop signs, or making unauthorized U-turns, residents expect law enforcement to engage motorists when they break the law. But this desire for enforcement doesn't obviate the need for police agencies to routinely publicly communicate, in various ways, crash data and enforcement actions. Explaining to the community why specific types of enforcement action are prioritized will go a long way toward building trust and legitimacy when traffic stops are necessary.

Police agencies should also seek community input on ways to improve road safety and promote programs designed to foster voluntary compliance. In Saint Paul, Minnesota, for example, the police department has partnered with a local nonprofit to host drive-in clinics where motorists can have their cars inspected for compliance. If equipment is found to need repair,

the driver may receive a voucher to help cover the cost. The aim of this program, and others like it, is to increase the number of vehicles in compliance with motor vehicle laws without needing to initiate a traffic stop.

3. Research and implement automated traffic enforcement technology.

Although not without its critics, automated speed and red-light cameras have a track record as an effective solution for reducing risky behaviors associated with traffic fatalities.⁹⁴ They are not a substitute for law enforcement, but they do serve as a force multiplier, helping to free up officers to attend to other duties that require their attention. Prior to implementation, jurisdictions should develop a plan to collect, analyze, and publish speed and intersection data, enabling consistent evaluation and public sharing of whether the cameras' goals—such as reducing the number of crashes, serious injuries, speed violations, and red-light violations—are being achieved.

In addition, new technologies like speed-based interlock devices give judges the discretion to require reckless drivers to use speed-limiting technology on their vehicles.⁹⁵ Like ignition interlocks, “which use breathalyzers to prevent people from starting a car when their blood alcohol hits a certain threshold,”⁹⁶ “speed governors” or “intelligent speed assistance devices” are meant to curb the behaviors of dangerous drivers by setting a maximum speed the driver cannot exceed.⁹⁷ Police chiefs and sheriffs may want to lobby their legislators to add this technology to the range of penalties judges can issue to reckless drivers.

4. Identify lessons learned when preparing for the deployment of autonomous vehicles.

If they haven't arrived yet, AVs are likely coming soon to a city near you. Fortunately, places like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Phoenix, Austin, and Washington, D.C., have already identified and worked through many of the challenges AVs present. These cities should serve as an information resource for other jurisdictions as they welcome this new mode of transportation.

To make the transition as smooth as possible, consider adopting the following lessons learned: Coordinate and plan with all stakeholders, ensuring law enforcement, engineering, and transportation all have a seat at the table; develop a permitting and safety structure all AV companies must meet before being authorized to operate; create uniform policies, standards, and protocols when interacting with AV companies, including procedures for problem-solving with a designated liaison, contacting company dispatchers, and moving AVs that are blocking roadways; require companies adapt to the jurisdiction's needs (not the other way around) to ensure consistent regulatory practices; think proactively about what law enforcement needs to know when interacting with AVs; and ensure vendors deliver training for all law enforcement personnel before operations begin.

94. “Governors Highway Safety Association” (see note 71).

95. Brey, “Vehicle Speed-Limiting Technology” (see note 79).

96. Brey, “Vehicle Speed-Limiting Technology” (see note 79).

97. Brey, “Vehicle Speed-Limiting Technology” (see note 79).

5. Partner with other agencies to implement Vision Zero strategies.

Roughly 40,000 people perish in traffic fatalities each year in the United States; reducing this number to zero may seem implausible. But each community's commitment to applying Safe System principles of education, engineering, and enforcement to those roadways with the highest rates of fatalities and injuries would be an important step toward achieving the ambitious public health goal of Vision Zero.

Vision Zero shifts traffic safety from the sole burden of law enforcement to the shared responsibility of a coordinated, multi-agency approach. Common strategies include road reconfiguration (reducing travel lanes, installing pedestrian refuges, separating bike lanes), lower speed limits, targeted enforcement campaigns, and public awareness efforts, which reflect police leaders collaborating with city engineers and departments of transportation to develop and implement a wide range of best practices that help reduce traffic fatalities. Strong partnerships, characterized by consistent practices of accountability and program evaluation, are essential for ensuring these strategies are effectively implemented and achieve the desired outcomes.

6. Develop a comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to street takeovers.

Street takeovers have become a major nuisance and threat to public safety in jurisdictions nationwide. Far from harmless youthful acts of exuberance, they are associated with impeding roadways, screeching tires, threatening motorists, damaging private property, interrupting business, assaulting police officers, and facilitating a wide range of other crimes including drug trafficking and money laundering.

Effectively combating street takeovers requires thoughtful planning, interagency collaboration, and often significant resources. Successful agencies have marshaled the resources of real-time crime centers to monitor social media, formed special response teams to mobilize and disperse participants as they begin to gather, developed trespassing protocols with business owners, created detective units to conduct follow-up investigations and criminally charge participants, shared intelligence with surrounding jurisdictions, and publicized enforcement actions to keep the public abreast of actions taken and discourage future events.

7. Consider the role professional staff can play in traffic enforcement.

There are few operational roles professional staff can fill in police departments, but traffic is one of them. For example, some agencies in North Carolina hire civilian traffic investigators to "respond to non-emergency traffic issues like road closures, fender benders, traffic direction, property damage—only vehicle crashes, and stranded motorists."⁹⁸ And in Philadelphia, civilian public safety officers are tasked with "directing traffic, writing tickets, and ordering abandoned vehicles removed from city streets."⁹⁹ Hiring professional staff for these positions is a tremendous asset during times of sworn staffing shortages and—even when departments are fully staffed—frees up sworn officers to respond to more serious calls for service, engage in community outreach, and conduct proactive patrols, including traffic enforcement.

98. PERF, *Embracing Civilianization* (see note 64).

99. MacDonald, "New Philly Public Safety" (see note 65).

8. Create an organizational culture that values and prioritizes traffic safety.

Top-down messaging is crucial for reiterating the importance of traffic enforcement. Leadership messaging should emphasize traffic enforcement—and more importantly, should highlight its impact on public safety. Police officers must be reminded of the purpose and importance of traffic enforcement through formal training, roll call briefings, enforcement operations, and informal interactions with their supervisors in the field and while reviewing reports.

Many agencies have turned to data to make the case internally that traffic enforcement is essential in saving lives. Colonel Tim Cameron of the Wyoming Highway Patrol emphasizes that outcomes—reductions in DUIs and fatalities, for example—are more important than outputs, such as the number of traffic stops conducted. And the Fairfax County Police Department has recommitted itself to developing an organizational culture that values and prioritizes traffic safety by showing personnel videos of officer-involved traffic fatalities, bringing in family members of victims, and creating an award structure for traffic enforcement.

9. Invest in impairment detection technology.

Gone are the days when an officer needed only a breathalyzer to measure a person's blood alcohol level. With one study finding 55 percent "of the injured or killed roadway users tested positive for one or more drugs (including alcohol),"¹⁰⁰ and another study detecting drugs in more than 87 percent of samples (cannabinoids, methamphetamine, and amphetamines being the most common),¹⁰¹ law enforcement must adopt new technology to identify other substances that impair motorists. These devices—which early research has found to be effective¹⁰²—work similarly to an alcohol breathalyzer and can be used by officers at the scene of a stop (on the side of the road). Federal legislation now provides a long-term solution by requiring new cars to be equipped with passive detection devices that will stop impaired drivers from operating their vehicles.¹⁰³ This technology is expected to save thousands of lives each year, but it will take time for the mandate to be implemented and for the devices to be integrated into the vehicle fleet. Effective enforcement will remain critical well into the future.

10. Balance traffic safety with community trust.

Traffic enforcement for minor equipment violations has eroded community trust in some places, particularly in minority communities. But traffic safety and community trust need not be in conflict. The Fayetteville (North Carolina) Police Department (FPD) showed how law enforcement can focus on traffic stops for infractions that threaten safety—speeding, running stop signs and red lights, and reckless driving—and reduce stops for non-safety violations like expired tags, window tint, loud exhaust, and objects hanging from a vehicle's rearview mirror. The thoughtful way FPD adopted and executed this policy demonstrated how police agencies can effectively balance traffic safety with community trust, reducing both car crashes and disparities in traffic stops without compromising other crime prevention efforts.

100. Thomas et al., *Drug Prevalence* (see note 34).

101. Office of Traffic Safety, "Roadside Screening Tools" (see note 35).

102. Office of Traffic Safety, "Roadside Screening Tools" (see note 35).

103. "Advanced Impaired Driving Technology," 49 U.S.C. § 30111 (2023), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2023-title49/html/USCODE-2023-title49-subtitleVI-partA-chap301-subchapII.htm>.



Conclusion

For many years, the largest segment of U.S. deaths from unintentional injuries was due to motor vehicle crashes¹⁰⁴—until accidental poisonings (including drug overdoses) surpassed them in the early 2010s.¹⁰⁵ Today, motor vehicle crashes remain a top public safety concern as the leading cause of preventable death¹⁰⁶ for 5- to 22-year-olds and the second leading cause of preventable death for people 23 to 67 years old.¹⁰⁷

Several explanations have been proposed for the sharp rise in U.S. traffic fatalities in the early 2020s. These include reduced traffic enforcement during the pandemic; the widespread use of distracting smartphones and in-car technologies; and high rates of impaired driving involving alcohol, marijuana, and other illicit substances. But interestingly, traffic fatalities in EU and EFTA countries declined during the same period.

The number one priority of law enforcement is to protect human lives, and community members consistently report traffic safety concerns to police more often than all other public safety issues. However, because of law enforcement staffing shortages, widespread protests in 2020, and legislative changes, the rise in traffic fatalities was accompanied by a decline in traffic enforcement.

104. "Unintentional injuries" is by far the leading cause of death among Americans ages 1–44, who are less likely than other age groups to die from illness.

105. WISQARS (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System), "Injuries and Violence Are Leading Causes of Death," U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed August 14, 2025, <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/animated-leading-causes/>.

106. "Preventable deaths are defined as deaths which can be avoided by effective and timely public health and primary care interventions." In *Frontiers in Public Health*, "Reducing Preventable Deaths: Health Education and Policy," accessed August 25, 2025, <https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/30536/reducing-preventable-deaths-health-education-and-policy/magazine>.

107. NSC (National Safety Council), "Deaths By Demographics," accessed August 25, 2025, <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/all-injuries/deaths-by-demographics/deaths-by-age/data-details/>.

A key takeaway from this report is that traffic safety issues are too often viewed through the narrow lens of law enforcement, obscuring other potential solutions from consideration. The Vision Zero initiative, developed in Sweden and adopted by at least 74 communities in the United States,¹⁰⁸ seeks to overcome this myopia by promoting a collaborative approach to eliminate fatal and serious traffic crashes through a combination of enforcement, education, and engineering strategies. Options may include conducting a speed study, increasing the time between signal changes, using electronic signboards, narrowing traffic lanes, adding curb cuts for pedestrians, installing crosswalks, and issuing warnings and citations for specific infractions, such as distracted driving or excessive speed.

In addition to traditional, officer-initiated enforcement actions, jurisdictions are adopting emerging technologies to improve traffic safety. With staffing shortages nationwide making it difficult for police leaders to handle effectively the wide range of public safety issues they face, tools such as speed cameras and red-light cameras allow jurisdictions to carry out some traffic enforcement while police officers focus on the crimes and disorder they are uniquely trained, equipped, and authorized to address.

A particularly frustrating road safety problem for both police and the public is street takeovers. These events function as mass traffic violations—characterized by double parking, traffic jams, blocked intersections, squealing tires, rumbling exhaust, excessive speeds, defiance of law enforcement, and occasional violence and property damage—making them both a nuisance and a danger. Police leaders report that many people involved in street takeovers travel long distances and cross jurisdictional boundaries to participate, and they call attention to the nexus between street takeovers and more serious crimes like acts of violence, drug dealing, money laundering, and even human trafficking. A proactive, collaborative, intelligence-led approach, backed by legislative action to hold both drivers and spectators responsible, is essential in combating street takeovers and investigating other crimes often linked to them.

Law enforcement agencies are also facing challenges from a new form of transportation: autonomous vehicles. Already operating as taxi services in cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Austin, and Phoenix, AVs are expected to expand rapidly to other cities, and it might not be long before they are available for personal use as well. Key issues for law enforcement as AVs proliferate include standardizing policies and practices among vendors, using geofencing to block AVs from restricted areas, quickly moving AVs in emergencies, and holding parties accountable for traffic violations. It remains to be seen on a large scale how criminals might attempt to misuse AVs for criminal purposes, making it crucial for vendors and law enforcement to stay vigilant for any criminal activity involving AVs and to share information widely if they detect such activity.

This report's **10 Recommendations to Promote Traffic Safety** emphasize the essential role law enforcement plays in saving lives and maintaining order on the nation's roads. Many police agencies appear to have embraced this responsibility. Since peaking in 2021, traffic fatalities have steadily decreased each year as traffic stops have gradually rebounded toward pre-pandemic levels. Meanwhile, police leaders who attended PERF's meeting said they are making a concerted effort to educate all officers that traffic safety and enforcement are part of their fundamental responsibilities—not just tasks for specialized unit personnel. To the extent police had deprioritized traffic safety for several years, these are promising signs of safer roads ahead.

108. "Vision Zero Communities" (see note 42).



As police agencies re-prioritize their commitment to road safety, they should do so with the understanding that traffic stops can become a flashpoint for conflicts with the public. Pretextual stops should be used sparingly, and only when there is a compelling reason, such as an articulable nexus to a serious crime. Creating and enacting a clear traffic enforcement policy, guided by community input and based on data and best practices—such as the Fayetteville Police Department’s policy to stop motorists only for safety-related infractions—is an effective way to both reduce traffic crashes and maintain community trust.



Appendix.

Meeting Participants



This list represents the positions each attendee held at the time of the PERF traffic enforcement meeting in March 2025.

Bob Blakley

Assistant Chief – Operations
Fairfax County (Virginia) Police Department

Jeremy Boshnack

Commander of Collaborative
Response Division
Long Beach (California) Police Department

Erin Brandt

Lieutenant
Anne Arundel County (Maryland)
Police Department

Craig Browning

Lieutenant
Louisville (Kentucky) Metropolitan
Police Department

Jovan Campbell

Major
Miami Beach (Florida) Police Department

Tim Cameron

Colonel
Wyoming Highway Patrol

Humberto Cardounel

Chief (ret.), Henrico County (Virginia)
Police Department
Senior Director of Training and Technical
Assistance, National Policing Institute

Ira Cavin

Lieutenant
Yakima (Washington) Police Department

Sarah Chervenak

Director
Institute for Intergovernmental Research

William Chisholm

Lieutenant
Virginia Beach Police Department

Christine Cole

Senior Advisor
21CP Solutions

Kenneth Collier

Sergeant
Sacramento (California) Police Department

Tim Cutwright

Corporal
University of Tennessee Police Department

Joshua Downing

Lieutenant Colonel
Colorado State Patrol

Sophia Dudkovsky

Special Assistant
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration

Steven Edwards

Captain
Overland Park (Kansas) Police Department

Thomas Eicher

Director (ret.)
Office of Public Integrity and Accountability
Office of the New Jersey Attorney General

Brian Evans

Deputy Chief
Knoxville (Tennessee) Police Department

Shahram Fard

Chief
Falls Church (Virginia) Police Department

Jill Frankfruth

Captain
Minnesota State Patrol

Paul Fredrickson

Captain – Traffic Safety Unit
Oklahoma City Police Department

Daniela Gilbert

Director of Redefining Public Safety
Vera Institute of Justice

Anthony Gonzalez

Corporal
Pineville (North Carolina) Police Department

Steve Hall

Sheriff
St. Mary's County (Maryland) Sheriff's Office

Ellie Hansen

Project Associate
National Policing Institute

James Helms

Lieutenant
Kitty Hawk (North Carolina)
Police Department

Carlos Heraud

Assistant Chief
Washington (D.C.) Metropolitan
Police Department

David Hill

Major
Loudoun County (Virginia) Sheriff's Office

Ron Humble

Officer
University of Tennessee Police Department

Warren Jensen

Captain
Montgomery County (Maryland)
Police Department

Alexander Jones

Chief
Arlington (Texas) Police Department

Greg Jones

Assistant Chief
Henrico County (Virginia) Police Division

Nicole Jones

Commander
San Francisco (California) Police Department

Joseph Killo

Captain
Prince George's County (Maryland)
Police Department

Shawn Kopelove

Lieutenant – Traffic Safety
Henrico County (Virginia) Police Division

Justin Lane

Captain
Tucson (Arizona) Police Department

Kyle Livengood

Major
Overland Park (Kansas) Police Department

Sherri Mahlik

Senior Research Associate
Institute for Intergovernmental Research

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Assistant Chief
Montgomery County (Maryland)
Police Department

Matt McCord

Major
Tulsa (Oklahoma) Police Department

Chad Melby

Captain
Prince George's County (Maryland)
Police Department

Jeffrey Michael

Distinguished Scholar
Johns Hopkins University

Chad Miller

Captain
Baltimore County (Maryland)
Police Department

Tim Nagtegaal

Inspector
Peel (Ontario) Regional Police

Karl Oakman

Chief
Kansas City (Kansas) Police Department

Sunwoo Oh

Policy & Advocacy Manager
Vera Institute of Justice

Shawn Peak

Lieutenant
Prince William County (Virginia)
Police Department

Matthew Pecka

Captain
Henrico County (Virginia)
Police Division

Robert Peirce

RN Peirce International Inc.

Mickey Petersen

Captain
Tucson (Arizona) Police Department

Billy Pike

Motor Officer
University of Tennessee Police Department

Michael Politano

Lieutenant
Los Angeles County (California)
Sheriff's Department

David Powell

Assistant Chief
Knoxville (Tennessee) Police Department

David Price

Sergeant
Miami Beach (Florida) Police Department

Jason Proctor

Captain
Metropolitan Nashville (Tennessee)
Police Department

Paul Qureshi

Acting Inspector
Toronto (Ontario) Police Service

Richard Retting

Senior Program Manager
National Academies Transportation
Research Board

Robert Rummel

Chief of Staff & Senior Director
Motorola Solutions

Sean Rushton

Director of Communications
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration

Jeffrey Satur

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Longmont (Colorado) Police Department

Christopher Sawyer

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Timothy Schultz

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Anne Arundel County (Maryland)
Police Department

Anthony Shank

Captain
Volusia (Florida) Sheriff's Office

Peter Simshauser

Acting Administrator
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration

David Smith

Captain
Prince William County (Virginia)
Police Department

David Smyser

Deputy Chief
Urbana (Illinois) Police Department

Timothy Spicer

Lieutenant Colonel
Tennessee Highway Patrol

Brad Squires

Lieutenant
Township of West Orange (New Jersey)
Police Department

Steven Strachan

Executive Director
Washington Association of Sheriffs and
Police Chiefs

Doug Taylor

Major
Tennessee Highway Patrol

Ronald Teachman

Academy Director
Prince William County (Virginia)
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Craig Valenzuela

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Los Angeles (California) Police Department

Daniel Villeneuve

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University of Tennessee Police Department

Jessica Ware

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Solebury (Pennsylvania) Police Department

Christopher Warren

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Baltimore (Maryland) Police Department

Laura Waxman

Director of Public Safety
U.S. Conference of Mayors

John Webb

Major
Baltimore (Maryland) Police Department

Mike Wedin

Major
Minnesota State Patrol

Keith Williams

Division Chief
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration

Patrick Windus

Sergeant – Traffic Investigation
Minneapolis (Minnesota)
Police Department

Seth Zarzycki

Officer
University of Tennessee Police Department



The Police Executive Research Forum



The **Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)** is an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force; developing community policing and problem-oriented policing; using technologies to deliver police services to the community; and developing and assessing crime reduction strategies. Over the past decade, PERF has led efforts to reduce police use of force through its Guiding Principles on Use of Force and Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) training program.

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership; public debate of police and criminal justice issues; and research and policy development. The nature of PERF's work can be seen in the reports PERF has published over the years. Most of these reports are available without charge online. All the titles in the Critical Issues in Policing series can be found on the PERF website. Recent reports include *Opioid Deaths Fall as Law Enforcement and Public Health Find Common Ground*; *The First Six Months: A Police Chief's Guide to Starting Off on the Right Foot*; *Call for Help: Treatment Centers for Police Officers*; and *Managing Officer-Involved Critical Incidents: Guidelines to Achieve Consistency, Transparency, and Fairness*.

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts management studies of individual law enforcement agencies; educates hundreds of police officials each year in the Senior Management Institute for Police, a three-week executive development program; and provides executive search services to governments looking to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from its status as a membership organization of police officials, who share information and open their agencies to research and study. PERF members also include academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice. All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and subscribe to

a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

PERF is governed by a member-elected President and Board of Directors and a Board-appointed Executive Director.



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