

Across America, the number of people struck and killed while walking has gone up 45 percent in a decade, and people of color, older adults, and people walking in low-income neighborhoods were killed at significantly higher rates, according to the urban planning nonprofit Smart Growth America (SGA).

On March 10, 2021, SGA released its *Dangerous by Design 2021* report which examined motor vehicle traffic-related pedestrian deaths across the United States. Nearly every state in the U.S. has grown more dangerous for pedestrians and the disparities in deaths based on the victims' location, age and race are alarming.

According to the report, black people were struck and killed by drivers at an 82 percent higher rate than white, non-Hispanic Americans. The fatality rate for people walking in the lowest income neighborhoods was nearly twice that of middle-income census tracts and almost three times that of neighborhoods at higher levels of income (measured in median household income).

The report explains, low-income communities are significantly less likely to have sidewalks, marked crosswalks, and street design to support safer, slower speeds and it is likely that many of the people walking in these lower-income census tracts are also lower-income themselves. People in lower-income communities are less likely to have cars, the report adds.

All people do not experience the benefits and burdens of transportation policy and funding decisions equally, the report acknowledges. Structural racism has guided many of the decisions made about housing and transportation for decades. The construction of the National Highway System disproportionately carved through communities of color. "Urban renewal" projects have displaced more than a million Americans and continue to harm Black and Brown communities today.

A main theme throughout the report - **speed kills**. Designing roads for high speeds dramatically increases the likelihood that a person struck while walking will be killed. At 40 miles per hour, 85 percent of crashes involving a person walking are fatal. Designing streets for slower speeds is directly connected to improving safety and reducing deaths. Good design leads to better driving behavior, fewer mistakes, and mistakes with less deadly impacts.

The report notes, while it is important to lower speed limits, additional safeguards need to be developed:

- Safe designs give drivers visual cues to slow down,
- Narrower travel lanes naturally slow traffic,
- High-visibility, signalized crosswalks make drivers more aware of pedestrians, and extended curbs shorten the distance required to cross the street,
- Decreasing the distance between intersections also helps reduce speeds,
- Adding signalized crosswalks in the middle of long blocks slows traffic and provides valuable new connections where people already want to walk,
- Eliminating right turn "slip" lanes in favor of right-angle turns produces slower, safer turns and shorter crossing distances for pedestrians.

While the report covers 2010-2019 data, there is a section on preliminary data about 2020 and the impacts of COVID-19. When congestion disappeared in 2020 due to COVID-19, speeding went up and thousands more people died, even though driving was down. Although USDOT will not release 2020 fatality data until the end of this year at the earliest, the National Safety Council is already estimating a 24 percent spike in (all) traffic fatality rates in 2020—the biggest increase in 96 years—as overall driving dropped precipitously. While the 2020 story is not complete, the correlation between speed and increased deaths appears linked.

The SGA report calls on states, localities, and the federal government to make improving pedestrian safety an urgent priority and identifies actions that can save lives. At the federal level, Smart Growth America asks the public to urge their congressional representatives to stand up for safety by sponsoring the Complete Streets Act, which would require state departments of transportation and metropolitan planning organizations to plan for all people who use the street, including the most vulnerable users.

"People are walking and biking more than ever," states Eric Alexander, Director of Vision Long Island and the Long Island Main Street Alliance, "and we must make towns, villages, county and state roadways as pedestrian/bicycle safe as possible. This report shows how important it is that we make sure federal, state, county and local funds continue to stream to safe pedestrian and bike projects. We need to continue to be a public voice for walking and biking safety for the folks in our communities."

Smart Growth America is holding a free online workshop on March 25, 2021 at 2 p.m. about the findings in the Dangerous by Design 2021 report. To register, visit <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/3842285578068546319>.

Access SGA full report here:

<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Dangerous-By-Design-2021.pdf>

Access SGA press release here:

<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/people-struck-and-killed-while-walking-up-45-percent-in-a-decade-because-streets-are-dangerous-by-design/>

View Complete Streets Act here:

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/2077>