WHERE WE STAND

AN UPDATE FROM

EAST-WEST GATEWAY
Council of Governments

MAY, 2005 • 4th Edition, Update #4

THE HUMAN TOLL OF MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES IN THE ST. LOUIS REGION

CRASH FATALITIES IN THE ST. LOUIS REGION

Between 1997 and 2003, there were 2,083 fatal motor vehicle crashes on the roadways of the St. Louis region that includes the City of St. Louis; Franklin, Jefferson, St. Charles, and St. Louis counties in Missouri; and Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair counties in Illinois. Crashes took the lives of 2,332 individuals.[1] This represents an average of 333 persons per year over the seven year period—almost one person every single day.

These are compelling numbers. But the most important thing about them is that they are not just numbers. Every individual who died was someone's daughter, son, father, mother, spouse, closest friend. Someone's future is forever changed when a sudden and premature injury death occurs. Taken together, these deaths impact the entire region.

The all-too frequent reaction is: "accidents happen." They do, but another important thing about these crash fatalities is that most of them are not accidents at all. They were preventable. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, an error on the part of the driver contributes to as many as 90 percent of all motor vehicle crashes. In the St. Louis region, the three most common causes of driver error are inattention, drinking, and speeding. If these factors were eliminated —or significantly reduced—most fatalities could have been avoided.

For every individual who dies, many more are seriously injured. In the five Missouri counties of the St. Louis region, almost 23,700 motor vehicle crash victims visit emergency rooms every year. Nearly 1,760 are admitted to the hospital.[2]

WHERE WE STAND

Metro areas are hubs of the nation's population, as well as its commercial, social, cultural, research, and government activity. It can be expected that crash rates would be highest in these traffic centers. To gauge how the St. Louis metro area compares with others, East- West Gateway staff has analyzed the crash fatality records from the federal Fatal Accident Reporting System for 34 of the 35 major metro areas featured in our ongoing assessment *Where We Stand: A Strategic Assessment of the St. Louis Region*.[3] Earlier assessments were updated in 2004 to include the new MSA boundaries established one year earlier by the federal Office of Management and Budget.[4]

This analysis found that St. Louis is third highest among the metros in motor vehicle crash deaths per 100,000 population. This rank is illustrated in the chart at right. The rate is slightly worse than a year earlier—14.7 deaths per 100,000 population in 2003, compared to 14.2 in 2002. But the rank shows significant progress in the wrong direction—up to 3rd from 9th. Many of our competitors saw enough improvement during the year to push St. Louis up toward the high end of the chart.

DEATHS FROM MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES

Per 100,000 population, 2003

1	**Nashville**	**18.8**
2	Memphis	16.5
3	St. Louis	14.7
3	Phoenix	14.7
5	Atlanta	14.2
6	Louisville	13.6
7	Oklahoma City	13.1
8	Houston	12.9
9	Austin	12.4
9	Kansas City	12.4
11	San Antonio	12.3
12	Charlotte	11.9
13	Dallas	11.0
14	Baltimore	10.8
15	Cincinnati	10.6
	Average	10.6
15	Philadelphia	10.6
17	Indianapolis	10.3
18	San Diego	10.1
18	Columbus	10.1
20	Detroit	9.8
21	Pittsburgh	9.7
21	Washington DC	9.7
23	Minneapolis	9.2
24	Denver	8.8
25	Chicago	8.7
26	Salt Lake City	8.3
27	Los Angeles	7.9
28	Portland	7.5
28	Milwaukee	7.5
30	Seattle	7.0
31	San Francisco	6.9
32	New York	6.4
33	Cleveland	6.1
34	**Boston**	**6.0**

WORSE — AVERAGE — BETTER

Source: FARS, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, 2003

United States Census Bureau, 2003

The chart also demonstrates that the average among the metro areas was 10.6 motor vehicle crash deaths per 100,000 population. The U.S. Surgeon General has set a goal for the nation of 9.0 crash fatalities per 100,000 persons by the year 2010.[5] If the St. Louis metropolitan area were to meet that goal, it would require a 39 percent reduction over 2003.

1 Fatal Accident Reporting System (FARS), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, US Department of Transportation, www.fars.nhtsa.dot.gov.

2 Averaged for the nine-year period 1994-2002. Data from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, www.dhss.state.mo.us.

3 Fatal crash data for the 35th MSA, Miami-Dade County, were not available.

4 The official St. Louis Metropolitan Statistical Area now includes the 16 counties of the City of St. Louis; Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln, St. Charles, St. Louis, Warren, and Washington counties in Missouri; Bond, Calhoun, Clinton, Jersey, Macoupin, Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair in Illinois. For more information, see www.census.gov.

5 Healthy People 2010 Injury Prevention Objectives, 15-15. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, www.safetypolicy.org.

TRAVELSAFE: SOMEONE'S FUTURE IS IN YOUR HANDS
East-West Gateway has joined with law enforcement officials, educators, engineers, and emergency response personnel from throughout the bi-state region to launch a multi- dimensional transportation safety campaign. Our objectives are to raise awareness of the extent of this problem and to encourage concerted, collaborative action to make a difference. Our message acknowledges the devastating impacts of driver error and encourages personal responsibility. Our theme is: when you are behind the wheel of a car, "*TravelSafe: Someone's Future is in Your Hands*."

For more information and to get involved in regional activities to make a difference, contact:
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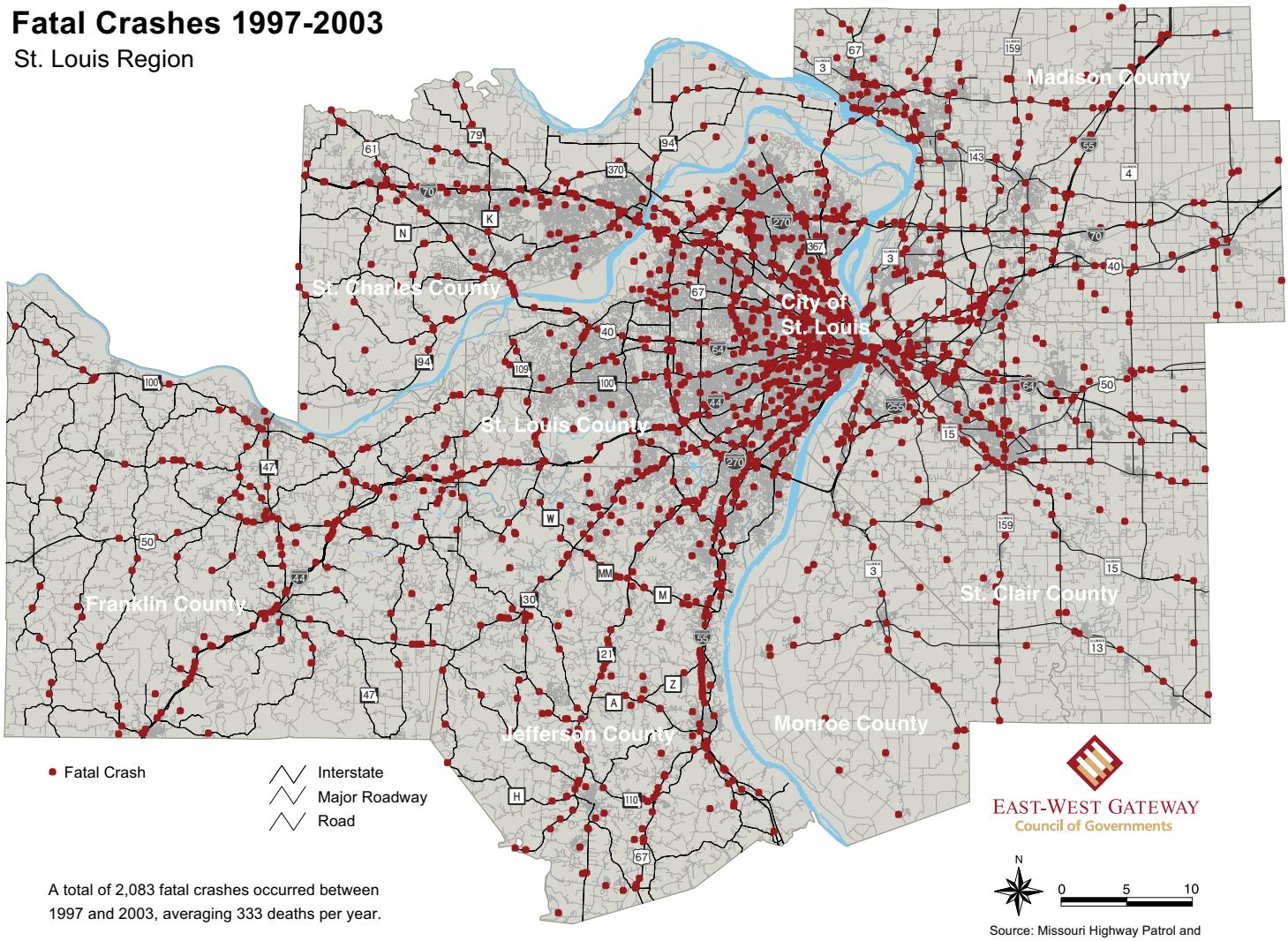
Fatal Crashes 1997-2003

St. Louis Region



A total of 2,083 fatal crashes occurred between 1997 and 2003, averaging 333 deaths per year.

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Source: Missouri Highway Patrol and Illinois State Police

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