The chart below indicates the driver behaviors noted in police reports from these fatal crashes. The most prevalent were inattention, driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, and speeding. In as many as one-third of all crashes, the driver was not paying full attention due to any number of distractions: eating, talking to passengers, using a cell phone, and more. Driving while intoxicated follows closely behind inattention as a contributing factor, accounting for 30 percent of the region’s fatal crashes. In fact, many of the crashes in which alcohol use was a factor also involved speeding, driving too fast for conditions, and improper lane usage. Drunk driving alone or in combination with other factors has cost the region almost $515 million over the past six years.

INTRODUCTION
Every day, St. Louis loses a piece of its future on area roadways. In 2002, traffic crashes in the metropolitan statistical area claimed the lives of 384 people. This number includes individuals from every age group, every walk-of-life, every racial and ethnic background, and every county in the 16-County MSA. It includes drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. Children and youth are disproportionately represented, however. St. Louisans between the ages of one and 34 are more likely to die as the result of a motor vehicle crash than any other single cause.

WHERE WE STAND
As the chart indicates, St. Louis ranked ninth among 34 peer metros in the rate of motor vehicle fatalities in 2002, with 14.2 lost lives per 100,000 population. St. Louis’ crash fatality rate is very similar to that of Kansas City. Among peer metros, overall, areas in Texas and Tennessee rank the highest. The top ten metropolitan areas are all located in the Midwest, South, or Southwest regions of the United States.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC COSTS OF CRASH FATALITIES
Motor vehicle crashes can have a devastating effect not only on the individuals involved, but also on family members and friends. They bring enormous economic costs, as well. According to the “The Economic Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes 2000,” a publication of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the costs of motor vehicle crashes, including lost workplace and household activity, property damage, and medical and travel delay costs, reached $230.6 billion in the year 2000, an average of $820 for every person living in the United States.

This report places the national cost of an average roadway fatality at $977,000 and estimates the economic costs associated with a critically injured crash survivor at $1.1 million. Using this as a base measure, fatal crashes in the St. Louis MSA total over $375 million each year.

CRASHES IN THE GATEWAY REGION
East-West Gateway staff have analyzed many of the factors contributing to motor vehicle crashes in the eight-county region encompassing the City of St. Louis; Franklin, Jefferson, St. Charles, and St. Louis counties in Missouri; and Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair counties in Illinois. Specific actions taken (or not taken) by automobile drivers contributed to most of the 1,777 crash fatalities that occurred between 1997 and 2002.
The average number of individuals who died from motor vehicle crashes during the six-year period from 1997 to 2002 ranged from a high of 80 in St. Louis County to five in Monroe County.

Thirteen percent of fatal motor vehicle crashes in the region involved pedestrians. The percentage of fatal crashes involving pedestrians in the City of St. Louis was more than twice that—27.9 percent between 1997-2002.

THE REGION CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE
These data support the point that most motor vehicle crashes are not “accidents” at all—they could have been prevented. Transportation safety professionals recommend that communities wanting to reduce crashes and the severity of crashes use a four-pronged approach that focuses on four “Es:” Education, Enforcement, Emergency Response, and Engineering. St. Louis can make a difference with this kind of collaborative regional approach bringing together transportation officials, public safety officers, and public health officials to expose major safety issues on the area’s roadways and identify needs and opportunities for improvement.

WHERE WE STAND

AN UPDATE FROM

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. 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.

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.

Earlier assessments were updated in 2004 to include the new MSA boundaries established one year earlier by the federal Office of Management and Budget.

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.

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. If the St. Louis metropolitan area were to meet that goal, it would require a 39 percent reduction over 2003.

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.
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.”

Fatal Crashes 1997-2003
St. Louis Region

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

For more information and to get involved in regional activities to make a difference, contact:
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