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## Study shows rural roads are most deadly

By Tom Kenworthy, USA TODAY

The death rate for motorists on rural roads was more than 2½ times the rate for driving on all other roads in 2003, a study to be released Thursday shows

Safety improvements on rural, non-interstate routes have lagged, although driving on all U S roads and highways has become less dangerous since 1990, according to an analysis of federal highway data by The Road Information Program (TRIP).

"The nation's rural roads are exposing rural residents and visitors to an unacceptable level of risk," says William Wilkins, executive director of the highway information research organization in Washington. "We know how to make rural roads safer. What is missing is adequate funding for road safety projects that will save numerous lives."

Among the study's findings:

- 52% of the 42,301 average annual traffic deaths from 1999 through 2003 occurred on rural, non-interstate routes, although travel on those roads represents 28% of miles driven
- The death rate on rural roads in 2003 was 2.72 per 100 million miles driven, compared with 0.99 on all other roads
- From 1990 through 2003, the death rate on all routes excluding rural roads decreased 32%. The death rate on rural roads declined by 21% during the same period
- Many rural areas, particularly in the West and South, are gaining population, but roads in those areas are more likely than urban roads to have features that make driving hazardous. They include narrow lanes, limited shoulders, sharp curves, steep slopes and pavement drop-offs.

Tools to improve safety include rumble strips, better signs, lane markings and lighting, guardrails, and removal of obstacles along roadsides

A transportation spending bill pending in Congress could increase funding for rural road improvements. But substantial improvements will depend more on state and local funding, which represent about three-quarters of U.S. spending on roads and highways, says Frank Moretti, director of policy and research for TRIP.

TRIP is a non-profit group supported by insurance companies, labor unions and businesses involved in highway construction and engineering

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