



**BIKE  
WALK  
NEBRASKA**

— OUR ACTIVE —  
TRANSPORTATION  
ALLIANCE

Nebraska's Vulnerable Road User

# Crash Analysis

2024



# Executive Summary

When we look at crashes, it's common to think, "Was someone not paying attention?", "Did a pedestrian not look both ways when crossing the street?", or "Was someone under the influence?"

All of these questions place blame on the individual and make the event singular. Given the frequency of crashes in Nebraska, especially this year, we need to zoom out and examine whether our transportation systems are designed to prevent or perpetuate crashes.

For this analysis, Bike Walk Nebraska (BWN) found eighty-seven vulnerable road user injuries and twenty fatalities. We also included and compared statistics from the Nebraska Department of Transportation's (NDOT) daily traffic fatality counter.

From this analysis, we hope for community members and policy influencers alike to recognize the frequency of crashes, learn about systemic barriers and safe street designs, and hear our recommendations.

While the analysis features statistics and trends, each of these numbers represents a human being. Our response to crashes is vital in advocacy efforts, allowing us to be compassionate in complex and tragic conversations.

To every victim's loved ones, we at Bike Walk Nebraska send our heartfelt condolences for your loss. We will continue to be relentless in our efforts to make active transportation both enjoyable and safe.

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# What to do if involved in a crash:

What happens in the first minutes after a crash can have a big impact.

- Stay calm and call 911 immediately. Note that some officers are not current on vulnerable road user laws.
- Don't apologize or assume you're "okay." The adrenaline means you may not realize the extent of your injuries.
- Treat the crash scene like a crime scene. Leave your bike or gear where it is and take photos in relation to landmarks, like signs or intersections, road debris, skid marks, and witness locations.
- Photograph visible injuries and any damage to clothes and your gear.
- Record license plates, business cards, witness contact information, insurance/registration paperwork, reporting officer badges, etc.
- In your statement, stay focused on the facts. Accurate information and measurements of the scene are crucial.

## In the days following the crash:

- Get examined by a medical professional. Remember, some injuries may not be apparent at the scene.
- Download and save any digital data from your computer, watch, or smartphone.
- DO NOT post about your crash on social media; it could be monitored by insurance companies. Anything posted may be used against you.
- Purchase a new helmet. Save the old one until the injury/property claim is concluded.

# Data Overview

The data for this crash analysis was culminated by local crash reports and local news reporting from Jan. 1, 2024, until Oct. 31, 2024. The crash's date, location, who was involved, the severity of the victim's injuries, and whether it used person-first reporting were all documented if the information was present.

For 2024, Bike Walk Nebraska (BWN) focused on pedestrian, bicycle, scooter, and mobility device crashes, but will expand to tracking all vulnerable road users in the coming years.

Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) collects annual crash data broken down by who is involved, urban versus rural, and type of roadway. BWN has compared our fatality data with that provided by NDOT and has found that while we have the same statistic for pedestrian fatalities (16), NDOT reported four bicycle fatalities while we have identified three. This could be because they have additional resources to track this data, we vary in what is included in the "bicycle" category, or something else.

## Safety is the largest barrier to participation.

While Nebraska has a statistically low crash rate for vulnerable road users compared to other states, this is likely due to **Nebraskans not feeling safe enough to choose more active mobility options**. Therefore, any uptick in fatalities results in an astronomical statistical increase.

Overall, in 2024, there were twenty-four bike/scooter injuries, three bicycle/mobility device fatalities, sixty-three pedestrian injuries, and seventeen pedestrian fatalities across Nebraska. Four of the bicycle injuries and fifteen of the pedestrian injuries involved children. Twenty-nine out of the one-hundred-and-five crashes were reported by local media sources. Six out of those twenty-nine used some form of person-first reporting.

*Note: The data given is in reference to crashes reported. Many crashes or near misses go unreported.*

**104**

crashes reported  
in 2024

**21%**

of crashes  
occurred on state  
highways

**14%**

increase of  
pedestrian fatalities\*

**122%**

increase of  
bicyclist fatalities\*

Location	No. of Crashes	Pedestrian		Bicyclist	
		Injury	Fatality	Injury	Fatality
Beatrice	2			2	
Big Springs	1		1		
Crete	1	2			
Crofton	1	2			
Grand Island	1	1			
Hastings	1				1**
Kearney	2	2			1
La Vista	2	2			
Lincoln	15	7	4	4**	
Nebraska City	3				
Omaha	71	45	11	14**	
Papillion	1			1	
Scottsbluff	1			1	
Sidney	1	1			
Valentine	1				1

\*Source NDOT Traffic Fatality Comparison of 2019 to Dec. 11, 2024

\*\*Count includes scooter or mobility device users



Scan to view a map  
with each crash's  
location and details,  
as provided.

# Omaha Analysis

Nebraska is unable to move forward if its largest metro is statistically moving backwards in terms of road safety.

# 133%

increase of vulnerable road user fatalities in comparison to 2023\*

\*Source: City of Omaha Fatal Crash Dashboard as of Oct. 31st, 2024

We must note the **severity** and **frequency** of crashes in Omaha.

Omaha makes up 63% of pedestrian fatalities, 71% of pedestrian injuries, and 71% of wheeled device injuries statewide in 2024.

Omaha has spent years funding plans and proposals identifying opportunities for safe transportation systems.

The city created a [Transportation Master Plan](#) in 2011. A few years later, the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA) generated a [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#) for the region in 2015, shortly followed by a [Complete Streets Policy and Design Guide](#) in 2016.

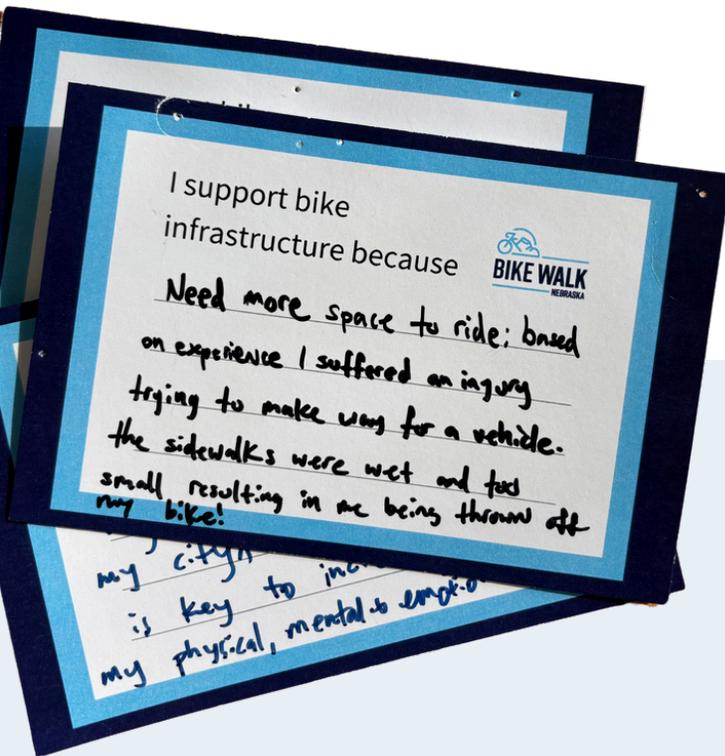
In 2023, Omaha unveiled a [Vision Zero Action Plan](#) to eliminate traffic deaths by 2045 and an [Active Mobility Master Plan](#).

Over the years, Omaha has invested in an expanding trail network and bike share system. However, active transportation infrastructure, such as on-street safety measures, is **vital to our metropolitan area, or we will continue to see high traffic deaths and serious injuries.**

# 71%

of Nebraska's vulnerable road user crashes occurred in Omaha, and account for 50% of non-motorized trips statewide

Source: Census Transportation Planning Product Data



60%

interested in biking, but are concerned about being on roadways

National studies showcase that 60% of U.S. adults, on average, would choose to bike around their community, but **only if with a buffer or separation from drivers**. When looking to effectively increase on-street safety, the focus should be on infrastructure to support those who would ride, if it was safe.

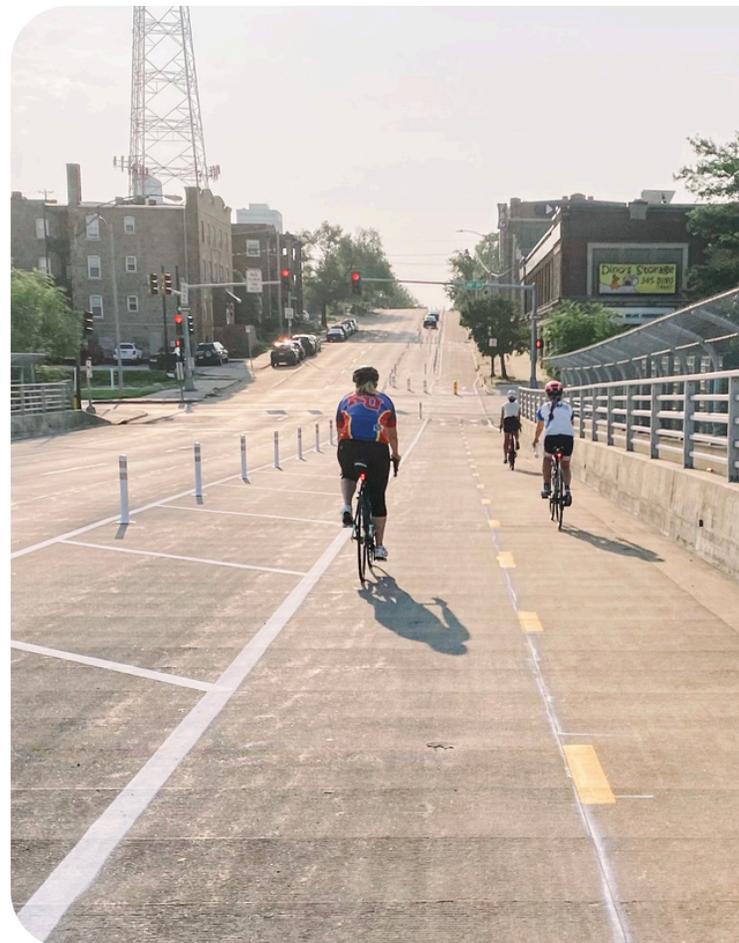
*Source: [Four Types Of Cyclists? Testing a Typology to Better Understand Bicycling Behavior and Potential](#)*

Allocating space for multiple modes of transportation also makes the roads safer for drivers, lowering congestion and minimizing crash risk.

An analysis of the singular, protected bikeway within Omaha, The Market-to-Midtown Bikeway Pilot Project run by Bike Walk Nebraska, showcased a 140% increase in bicycling along the bikeway corridor.

Active transportation infrastructure is a “build it, and they will come” investment: once a safe and accessible option is provided, it will get used.

With the tragic increase of severe injuries and fatalities of vulnerable road users in Omaha, **we implore the city to accelerate the investment in identified, protected, on-street systems** for multiple modes of transportation.



# What We Know About Crashes

## We Need Safe Transportation Systems

Two principles must be accepted to achieve safe transportation: **driver behavior must be considered** in planning, and **street and road design directly impacts the safety of all users**.

These principles are a part of [The Safe Systems Approach](#) to transportation planning.

Unlike traditional safety methods aiming to reduce crashes through enforcement (tickets) or behavior changes (following speed limit signs), the Safe Systems Approach takes a holistic view. It assumes people will make mistakes (because we all do), and emphasizes constructing roadways with methods **proven** to mitigate the severity and frequency of crashes that occur because of these inevitable mistakes.

Through proactive planning of transportation systems, Nebraska can see a decrease in traffic deaths for all road users.

## Driver Speed and Road Design Contribute to Crashes

Driver speed impacts both the frequency and severity of crashes on roadways. However, effectively managing speeding is less about enforcing speed limits and more about designing roads to naturally encourage safer speeds.

For example, urban roadways with multiple wide lanes, resembling highways, tend to promote higher driving speeds. In contrast, streets with traffic-calming features or on-street parking create a narrower visual and physical environment, encouraging drivers to slow down.

Improving road design can reduce crashes by up to

**50%**

Source: *The Federal Highway Administration*

Roadway and transportation system designs that lend themselves to unsafe roadways and higher crash rates **should be areas of focus when looking to keep our communities safe.**

## Highways Dividing Towns

In Nebraska, it's common to see towns divided by state highways.

Often, the highways either double as the town's main street or divide the town, with one side predominantly residential and the other featuring key destinations - community centers, schools, shopping, etc.

This puts thousands of Nebraskans in situations where they must cross major roadways, designed for moving vehicles but not for accommodating people.

21%

of Nebraska's vulnerable road user crashes involved minors in 2024

## The stories of Nebraskans

*Crofton, NE*

Two sisters, 8 and 12, were crossing Highway 12 (left) on their way to school in Crofton, Nebraska.

A driver failed to yield to the crosswalk signal, and both children were hit and suffered severe injuries.





# The stories of Nebraskans

Omaha, NE

Walter Tighe, 89, was walking to church when a driver struck and killed him near 34th and Center Street (left) in Omaha. The driver fled the scene but was later detained and charged with a Class 3 Felony.

# 65%

of safety concerns are at intersections

A survey of Omaha and Council-Bluff residents showed **57% of respondents feel unsafe as drivers while 29% felt unsafe as pedestrians.** Aside from driver behaviors such as speeding and distracted driving, residents felt most unsafe due to intersection or roadway design.

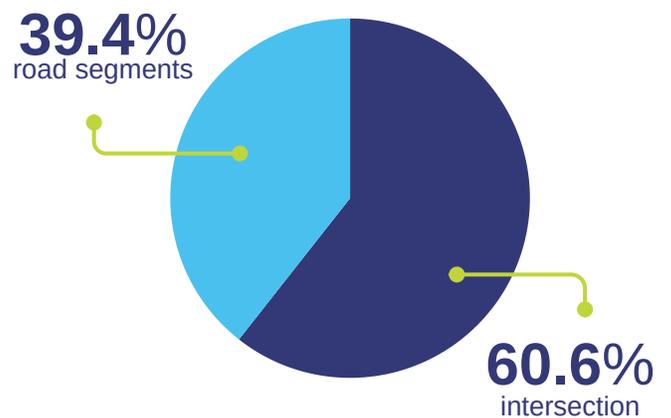
*Source: MAPA Safe Streets For All Survey Insights*

## Intersection Design

Whenever different modes of traffic intersect, the risk of conflict - and potential crashes - increases significantly.

Wide, open, and unmarked intersections are common in residential areas, leaving road users open to a slew of risky conflict points. The risk is compounded if intersections and roadways lack marked crossings.

In densely trafficked areas with multiple modes of mobility (walkers, drivers, buses, people using mobility devices, bicyclists), a minor miscalculation - like changing your music - can lead to a severe crash.



## Fatal Pedestrian & Bicyclist Crash Locations in Omaha, 2021 - 2024

*Source: City of Omaha Fatal Crash Dashboard as of Oct. 31st, 2024*

# Moving Forward: The Media Response

Language matters. The language used in the reporting of crashes heavily contributes to the culture, and the culture subsequently contributes to the judicial outcomes.

## It's a crash, not an accident.

Vulnerable road user crashes can be prevented through a proactive approach to design and education. Therefore, using “crash” instead of “accident” in reporting and conversation **acknowledges accountability**, whether human error or flawed street design.

Considering that the vast majority of information published on crashes comes from the media, we ask the media to begin using person-first language.

**It's important to say, “The driver of a pickup struck the bicyclist” instead of “A pickup struck the bike.”**

The vehicle is neither autonomous nor at fault. This shifts the focus from vehicles to people, emphasizing human responsibility as road users.

Most importantly, it humanizes the tragedy and supports conversations around road safety that are less about cars versus vulnerable road users.

Instead, it ensures the safety and comfort of real, living, breathing, and loving people getting around on foot, bike, and mobility devices.



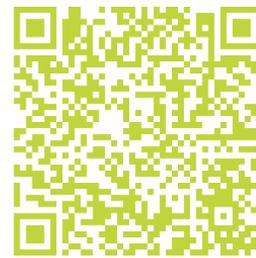
of crashes covered in 2024 **did not have** the use of person-first language in the media coverage

# Moving Forward: The Legal Response

Bike Walk Nebraska is championing a Vulnerable Road User law, sponsored by Senator Kathleen Kauth of Omaha, in the upcoming legislative session.

The law seeks to fortify sentencing options for drivers responsible for injuring or killing vulnerable road users and provide justice to victims' families.

A vulnerable road user is almost anyone not in a car, including, but not limited to, pedestrians, bicyclists, motorcyclists, road construction or utility workers, or someone operating farm equipment.



**Learn about VRU.**

Scan to read a blog post explaining the details of the VRU law.

## The stories of Nebraskans

*Omaha, NE*

**Matthew P. Latacha, MD, was killed after being struck from behind by a driver on Sept. 10, 2023.**

“Matthew was cycling legally on a road with excellent visibility. The driver had been following Matthew for nearly two miles, but failed to yield on the open roadway, despite no oncoming traffic.

The inattentive driver was charged with motor vehicle homicide due to "careless" driving....it is considered just a serious traffic ticket.

There are three categories: careless driving, reckless driving, and willful reckless driving.

Willful reckless includes things like DUI, excessive speeding, etc. By default, any accident that does not involve those parameters is deemed "careless"...most familiar with the facts [of Matthew's case] and the level of inattention by the driver feel that 'reckless' would have been the more appropriate designation.

Once "careless" driving was noted on the report, the options of the legal system were immediately limited.

Due to the minimal charges, the driver left for a planned vacation within two days of taking Matthew's life and was out of town for more than two weeks. He did not lose his license.”

**Statement by Kim Latacha, wife of the victim**

# Moving Forward: The State's Response

Nebraska is 48th out of 50 for bike-friendliness in the 2024 League of American Bicyclists' rankings. The rank is predominately based on the state's efforts, policies, and funding in relation to bicycle infrastructure and safety.

#48  
national rank  
(out of 50)

Nebraska is **only one of two states without a statewide Complete Streets policy.**

## Our Recommendations:

- 01** Nebraska's Department of Transportation (NDOT) should **reactivate its Active Transportation Committee**. A cross-sector committee can provide crucial expertise while NDOT moves from research to the development of a Complete Streets Policy.
- 02** NDOT should **follow-through on implementing** the studies and policies on the books **by setting measurable annual goals**. The State Highway Safety Plan, Long Range Transportation Plan, the forthcoming Complete Streets Policy, and the 2023 Vulnerable Road User assessment results contain goals and data related to making state roads safe for all users.
- 03** Two state statutes contradict each other regarding whether NDOT has the authority to fund and maintain adjacent infrastructure, such as sidewalks, when constructing roadways. Not having clarity on building roadways with multiple modes of transportation **generates missed opportunities** for the Department to reach its stated safety goals and is **an inefficient use of state resources**.



**Cultivating safe and accessible active  
transportation in Nebraska.**

108 N. 49th Street, Suite 206  
Omaha, Nebraska 68132

[www.bikewalknebraska.org](http://www.bikewalknebraska.org)

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