

# RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

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## Most dangerous intersections detailed in report; 20 in area

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The mechanics working at the Jiffy Lube on the corner of Sullivan Lane and Oddie Boulevard in Sparks didn't need a national road safety organization to tell them the intersection outside their front door is one of the most dangerous in the state.

The daily barrage of screeching wheels and honking horns, as well as the more-than-occasional crunch of colliding metal is sign enough.

"People are always speeding through yellow lights," said Enrique Cardenas, a mechanic at the oil-change shop. "At least once a day, you hear people honking. Whenever I'm driving through and the light turns green, I always wait a few seconds."

His co-worker, Chase Want, doesn't even bother going through the intersection on his way to work. He cuts through the parking lot instead.

Just one block west on Oddie Boulevard is the Reno-Sparks area's second most dangerous intersection at Sullivan Lane.

"I can tell you, you really have to be very cautious when you drive through that intersection," said Quilistine Walker, a tax-preparer at Liberty Income Tax Services. "People run red lights. You can easily have an accident. I've been in a near-miss myself."

A new report by the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit **The Road Information Program**, identified what it said are Nevada's 60 most dangerous intersections and stretches of highway throughout the state.

Twenty are in Northern Nevada and are known by area drivers as some of the most deadly.

They include Geiger Grade between Virginia City and Reno; State Route 88 in from Minden to the state line; U.S. 50 from Lake Tahoe to Carson City; and Nevada 117 near Fallon, portions of which are better known as Scheckler Road.

In Washoe County, the state's most dangerous intersections are all in Sparks, according to the report. They include Oddie Boulevard and Sullivan Lane, which ranked sixth most dangerous in the state; Oddie Boulevard and El Rancho Drive, which ranked 10th; and Pyramid Way and McCarran Boulevard, which ranked 26th.

TRIP officials hope the statistics in their report will prompt Nevadans to begin weighing the cost of dangerous roads and intersections in terms of human lives and economic loss from crashes, which could lead to pressure on government officials to do more to improve traffic safety.

"What are the costs and consequences of inadequately maintained roads?" said Frank Moretti, director of research and policy for TRIP. "(The public) might ask themselves if they are willing to pay pennies to save dollars."

While TRIP did not analyze specific improvements for the roads listed on its report, in general, it recommends such things as better lighting, improved signs and pavement markings, rumble strips, more lanes, resurfacing and paved shoulders.

Local and state officials acknowledged that many of the roads listed by TRIP are overwhelmed or the source of dangerous crashes. But they said that while they are focused on enhancing traffic safety, they lack the funding to make many needed improvements.

Funding roads

Nevada is in the midst of a \$5 billion shortfall in transportation funding for projects over the next decade.

Gov. Jim Gibbons has vowed not to raise taxes and rejected funding options proposed last year by a blue ribbon committee tasked with solving the problem.

Scott Rawlins, deputy director of the Nevada Department of Transportation, said road improvement needs outweigh resources.

"What we are seeing in the future is pretty bleak," he said. "We need funding to be able to do those improvements. And we just don't have the funding."

The Sparks intersections listed by TRIP as dangerous fall under the jurisdiction of the state, city spokesman Adam Mayberry said.

"It's a challenge for us when it's not in our jurisdiction," Mayberry said. "McCarran Boulevard and Pyramid, clearly that exceeds capacity, and we're under way now on studying a number of different alternatives to improve that intersection."

But he said he found it puzzling that other higher profile intersections in the Reno-Sparks area didn't make the list.

For example, high accident locations such as McCarran Boulevard and South Virginia Street and Plumb Lane and Kietzke Lane.

TRIP based its rankings on the number and severity of crashes, the length of the roadway and the overall traffic levels.

Traveling on a road with a moderate number of crashes but less traffic would put you at greater risk of a serious accident, Moretti said.

NDOT spokesman Scott Magruder said road engineers will examine the Oddie Boulevard intersections to see if any immediate improvements, such as road striping or signage, could be made.

He added that the state is preparing to turn Oddie Boulevard back to the city.

The organization also found that for the first time in four years, the number of traffic fatalities in Nevada dropped in 2007, bringing the state closer to the national average.

Reno area

The opposite was true in Washoe County, however, where the number of people killed in traffic crashes inched upward after a four-year decline.

Of the 371 people killed in Nevada traffic crashes last year, 46 died in Washoe County.

Despite the decline in traffic deaths statewide, officials warned that the speed at which Nevada's population is growing will mean fatalities could increase without the state improving traffic safety.

"Unless traffic safety is addressed in a very straight forward fashion ... you're likely to see fatalities increase," Moretti said.

Michael Geeser, spokesman for AAA Nevada, said the state also focus on driver behavior as well as road improvements.

"As we're standing here, we will find a number of drivers running red lights and not wearing their seat belts," he said during a press conference on the corner of Pyramid Way and McCarran Boulevard. "That is simply unacceptable."

AAA Nevada will push for a primary seat belt law next year when the Legislature convenes, which would allow police officers to stop a driver simply for not wearing a seat belt.