

Study ranks state 16th in rural road fatalities

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LITTLE ROCK — Traffic fatalities on rural roads in Arkansas are three times higher than on all other roadways in the state, according to a study intended to show the need for improvements to rural roads across the nation.

The [study released today](#) ranked Arkansas fourth nationally, based on 2009 statistics, in the number of vehicle fatalities per 100 million miles traveled on rural non-interstate roads with 2.89 deaths. South Carolina ranked first with 4.7 deaths and Florida was second with 3.47.

Arkansas ranked 16th nationally in the overall number of traffic fatalities on rural non-interstate roads in 2009 with 418 deaths. Texas ranked first with 1,490 and California second with 1,164.

The study, conducted by Washington-based TRIP, a national transportation research group funded by insurance companies and businesses involved in highway construction, also measured the condition of rural roads and bridges across the country.

“What we found is that these rural roads and bridges that serve and connect the nation’s rural communities face a number of significant challenges,” said Frank Moretti, director of research and policy for TRIP.

Randy Ort, spokesman for the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department, said he had not seen the report, but he said it was not surprising that fatal accidents occurred more often on rural roads.

“It doesn’t really surprise me that we’re going to rank highly in the number of fatalities on rural roads,” he said. “We’re a rural state.”

The study also ranked Arkansas eighth nationally in the percentage of rural roads considered to be in poor condition with 23 percent, and 13th nationally with 14 percent of its bridges considered functionally obsolete, that is, not meeting current design standards.

Ort questioned whether the TRIP study looked at all bridges across the state, or just rural bridges. He noted that about 4 percent of state highway bridges in the state are considered structurally deficient.

The study ranked Arkansas 13th best among the states in the lowest percentage of rural bridges considered structurally deficient with 8 percent. It defined structurally deficient bridges as those with deterioration of the bridge deck, support or other major components.

Bridges that are structurally deficient may be posted for lower weight limits or closed if their condition warrant such action, according to the study.

Pennsylvania ranked first with 28 percent of its bridges considered structurally deficient.

Among the challenges faced by rural roads and bridges, Moretti said, are inadequate capacity to handle the growing level of traffic and commerce in these regions; limited connectivity to many emerging areas; the inability to accommodate growing freight travel; deteriorated road and bridge conditions; a lack of desirable safety features; and a traffic fatality rate that is far higher than any other roads in the country.