

State's rural traffic fatality rate is 8th highest in the nation

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America's rural heartland is home to approximately 50 million people and its natural resources provide the primary source of the energy, food and fiber that supports the nation's economy and way of life. But, according to a new report, the roads and bridges that serve and connect the nation's rural areas face a number of significant challenges, including inadequate capacity to handle the growing levels of traffic and commerce, limited connectivity, the inability to accommodate growing freight travel, deteriorated road and bridge conditions, a lack of desirable safety features, and a traffic fatality rate far higher than all other roads and highways. The report, "Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland," was recently released by TRIP, a national non-profit transportation research group based in Washington, D.C. It defines Rural America as all places and people living outside urban areas of 5,000 or more.

Despite a recent decrease in the overall fatality rate on America's roads, traffic crashes and fatalities on Arizona's rural roads remain disproportionately high, occurring at a rate nearly three times higher than on all other roads.

According to the TRIP report, America must adopt transportation policies that will improve rural transportation connectivity, safety and conditions to provide the nation's small communities and rural areas with the level of safe and efficient access that will support quality of life and enhance economic productivity. This can be done, in part, by modernizing and extending key routes to accommodate personal and commercial travel, improving public transit access to rural areas, implementing needed roadway safety improvements, improving emergency response times, and adequately funding state and local transportation programs to insure sufficient preservation and maintenance of rural transportation assets.