



Claim: State's rural traffic fatality rate fifth highest in the nation

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- **Road builders' lobby says deteriorated rural roads and bridges hinder mobility and economic growth**
- **'Californians deserve to get where we're going safely'**

The roads connecting California's farm, forest, mountain and other rural communities is an unsafe, inadequate weak spot in the state's vast network of roads and bridges, claims a group representing those who profit from building roads and bridges.

The group claims that California's rural roads have a traffic fatality rate four times higher than all other roads and highways in the state with nearly 38 percent of all traffic fatalities happening on rural, non-Interstate roads.

The report, "Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland," was released today by The Road Information Program, known by its acronym TRIP, a Washington, D.C.-based organization sponsored by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, distributors and suppliers, businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction, labor unions, and others.

It defines "rural America" as all places and people living in areas outside of towns with a population of 5,000 or greater.

California ranks second in the nation in the number of fatalities on the state's rural, non-Interstate roads and fifth in the nation in the traffic fatality rate on its rural, non-Interstate roads, according to TRIP's research.

In 2009, California's non-Interstate rural roads had a traffic fatality rate of 2.86 deaths for every 100 million vehicle miles of travel, compared to a fatality rate on all other roads of 0.68 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles of travel, the organization says. Of the 3,081 traffic fatalities that occurred in California in 2009, 1,164 were on rural, non-Interstate roads, it says.

"Californians deserve to get where we're going safely, whether driving to shopping areas, trying to connect to an Interstate, visiting a state park or national forest, or going to the wine country or skiing," says Bert Sandman, executive director of Transportation California, another group in favor of highway rebuilding.

The TRIP report says "inadequate roadway safety design, longer emergency vehicle response times and the higher speeds traveled on rural roads" are factors in the higher traffic fatality rate, particularly on two-lane roads. "Many vital connector routes between towns and cities and between the major north-south freeways are hazardous two-lane roads," Mr. Sandman says.

According to the TRIP report, California has the 15th highest percentage of major rural pavements in poor condition in America. In 2008, 18 percent of the state's major rural roads were rated in poor condition and another 52 percent were rated in mediocre or fair condition, according to TRIP, which also issues an annual report on the condition of the nation's roads.

California also ranks 19th in the nation in the percentage of rural bridges that are structurally deficient, it adds. In 2010, 14 percent of the California's rural bridges were rated as structurally deficient and 13 percent were functionally obsolete.

"The safety and quality of life in California's small communities ride on our rural transportation system," says Tom Holsman, CEO of the Associated General Contractors of California. "Unemployment in California jumped to 12.4 percent in August; it's significantly higher in farm and rural areas."

Mr. Holsman says California's rural communities and economies are facing even higher unemployment and decline. "Upgrading our rural transportation system will create jobs and help ensure long-term economic development and quality of life in rural California," he says.

The safety issue is compounded by population growth in cities at the heart of rural, agricultural counties. "All the counties between Bakersfield and Stockton are now classified urban/exurban, despite the fact that this is the richest agricultural region in the country," says Mr. Sandman. "The rural transportation infrastructure can't accommodate the 15 percent to 27 percent population growth in those cities during the last decade."