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Older Drivers in More Fatal Car Crashes

1 In 5 Drivers Will be 65 or Older by 2025

By [Robert Longley](#), About.com Guide

Today's older Americans no longer sit in comfy rocking chairs by their fireplaces after they retire. Instead, they sit behind the wheels of their cars where they become involved in a disproportionately high number of [fatal automobile crashes](#), according to the Washington, D.C.-based, non-profit transportation research group [TRIP](#).

Figures from TRIP's report, [Keeping Baby Boomers Mobile](#), indicate that while overall traffic deaths in the U.S. have [declined in recent years](#), drivers 65 and over continue to be involved in more than their share of fatal crashes

During 2010, notes TRIP, there were 5,750 fatalities in crashes involving at least one driver 65 or older. And although drivers 65 and older account for only 8% of all miles driven annually, they comprise 17 percent of all traffic deaths.

How Much Do They Drive?

Since 2000, the percentage of licensed drivers in the U.S. age 65 and older has increased from 14% to 16%. At the end of 2010, about 34 million licensed drivers were 65 or older.

As a result of the [booming baby boomer population](#), TRIP projects that by 2025, one of every five drivers on the nation's roads will be 65 or older. Travel by drivers 65 and up now accounts for 8% of all miles traveled in the U.S.

See: [Boomers Now Fastest Growing Part of Population](#)

For those 65 and older, 90% of all travel is done in private vehicles. For Americans 85 and older, 80% of all travel occurs in private vehicles.

And They Will be Driving Even More

As TRIP points out, the baby boomers are the healthiest, wealthiest and most active generation of older Americans. "Because of good nutrition, improved health care, better education and higher incomes, new generations of older Americans will be more mobile, healthy and active for a longer portion of their lives than those just a few decades ago," notes the TRIP report. "Older Americans prize their mobility and active lifestyles and want to maintain them as long as possible. For many older people, driving remains the safest, easiest and most convenient means of transportation."

What Should be Done About This?

Since people are not going to just turn in their car keys on their 65th birthdays, some changes will be needed on the nation's streets and highways to ensure the safety and mobility of older drivers. And this is where the government must step in.

The [American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials](#) (AASHTO), the powerful non-profit organization that establishes design safety standards and protocols for the construction of public streets and highways nationwide, suggests a three pronged approach to keeping our growing population of older drivers safely on the road. As you might suspect, AASHTO's prongs will require Congress and money.

- As part of the [annual federal budget process](#), the [U.S. Congress](#), through its approval of the transportation spending bill, must allocate enough money for highway and [public transit projects](#) specifically designed to meet the needs of older drivers. A few of the

highway safety enhancements AASHTO suggests include: installing clearer, brighter, and simpler signage with large lettering; brighter street markings, particularly at intersections; widening or adding left-turn lanes and extending the length of merge or exit lanes; and adding driver attention-grabbing roadside rumble strips.

- Congress must also provide funds for programs to evaluate and monitor "at risk" older drivers through state drivers' licensing procedures, and to educate and re-train older drivers when necessary.
- Finally, funding must be provided to increase and improve alternative travel options for older people such as adding [public transit](#) routes, vehicles, facilities, and stops that are easily accessible and accommodating to older or disabled passengers.

As TRIP notes in its report, the best solution would be for Congress to [enact specific long-term legislation](#), insulated from the bi-partisan annual federal spending battles, designed to improve and ensure the safety of America's highways for drivers of all ages.

"The growing ranks of older Americans will far outpace previous generations with their level of mobility and activity. Serving their needs will require a transportation system that includes safer roads, safer vehicles, safer drivers and improved choices," said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP in a press release. "Congress can help not only older drivers, but all drivers by passing long-term federal surface transportation legislation now."