

Senior drivers more at risk in N.J.

Report says they die in higher proportions



Traffic on the Garden State Parkway heading southbound near exit 98. / Robert Ward / Staff Photographer

A national study of fatal crashes involving senior drivers found that a higher share of senior drivers in New Jersey died in traffic accidents in 2010 in proportion to the number of drivers age 65 and above who hold a license.

The report found that 17 percent of licensed drivers in New Jersey are at least 65, but that senior drivers were 21 percent of those killed in fatal crashes in 2010. It was released Wednesday by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and TRIP, a national nonprofit transportation research group.

In 2010, 119 drivers age 65 and up lost their lives out of the 556 people who were killed in

traffic accidents in New Jersey that year, the report said. In 2010, New Jersey had 1,005,040 licensed drivers at least 65 years old.

“We didn’t go into detail to understand why some states came up so high,” said Frank Moretti, TRIP director of policy and research, about the New Jersey numbers. “We saw a higher share than we expected.”

State Department of Transportation officials said they’ve already implemented some of the strategies recommended in the report to improve safety for older drivers, said DOT spokesman Joseph Dee.

“Any statistic that indicates we have a safety issue is something we’re interested in looking at how to better address it,” Dee said.

No testing

The report didn’t recommend more frequent testing of older drivers, which New Jersey doesn’t require. Instead, the report leans toward family intervention and self-regulation being practiced by seniors, such as not driving at night or during busy rush hours.

“There has been kickback against that strong kind of regular testing,” Moretti said “Research suggests that interceding early doesn’t create that big a benefit.”

“Steps we recommended are to improve (transportation) alternatives before you take away a person’s license,” Moretti said, adding that 90 percent of older Americans depend on driving.

The report suggests seniors take advantage of driver refresher courses offered by AARP and AAA, which address the loss or decline of certain skills with age. It also recommends that senior drivers take online self-assessment tests, such as AARP’s [10 Signs It’s Time to Limit or Stop Driving](#), Helpguide.org’s [senior driving safety tips](#) and Silver Century’s [road skills report](#).

The report supports road improvements, which have been done on state highways in New Jersey, such as widening lines on roads from four to six inches, using advanced street name and guide signs with larger lettering, larger stop and yield signs and the use of countdown pedestrian signs.

New Jersey has added rumble strips on the left and right shoulders of state highways and has experimented with “mini rumble strips” on the center line of some highways to warn drivers they’re crossing into oncoming traffic, Dee said.