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## Texas Gets Poor Marks on Pedestrian Safety

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Mayor Annise Parker Executive Order

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Smart Growth America, a nonprofit that advocates for neighborhood safety.

Texas ranked as the 10th most dangerous state for walking commuters, with nearly 4,200 pedestrian deaths between 2003 and 2012. That's roughly 10 percent of such deaths nationally during that time period, according to data compiled from

Houston pedestrians better cross with care. The city is the seventh most dangerous in the nation for people on foot, according to a new [report](#) from the National Complete Streets Coalition at

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### National Highway Traffic Safety Administration statistics.

Although the total number of traffic fatalities has decreased nationally, the number of pedestrian deaths has grown. In 2012, 15 percent of all traffic fatalities involved people on foot.

As Congress considers reauthorizing MAP-21, a 2012 law that funds national transportation infrastructure, nonprofits like [Smart Growth America](#) and their pro-public safety allies are urging lawmakers nationwide to pass additional federal policy that would ensure pedestrian safety.

“This is about making smarter choices, investing our transportation dollars in projects that help achieve multiple community goals, including public health and supporting local economies,” said Roger Millar, the director of the coalition.



Using numbers from the National Weather Service, the reports says the number of pedestrian deaths in the past decade — 47,000 — is 16 times higher than the number of people who died in natural disasters. But “pedestrian deaths don’t receive a corresponding level of urgency,” Millar added.

In 2010, a total of 4,280 people on foot died in traffic accidents; in 2012, that number rose to 4,743. Using fatality data, as well as census data on commuters who walk to work, researchers at the coalition calculated a “Pedestrian Danger Index” (PDI) that measures the potential risks of walking in metropolitan areas. The Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown area received a PDI of 119.64, compared with the national average of 52.2. The Orlando-Kissimmee area in Florida came in first with a PDI of 244.28.

When the same pedestrian danger index was applied to states, Texas came in 10th; Florida and Alabama took first and second. Millar said southern states are more likely to be dangerous places to walk because of their rapid post-war development, during which new roads were built wider to accommodate more cars at higher speeds. “We need to change that worldview,” he added.

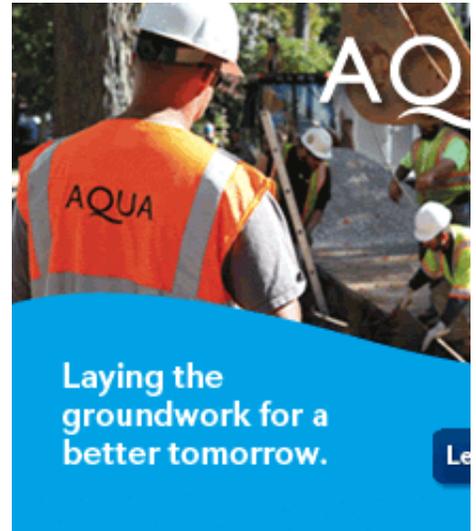
There are two key explanations for the danger of Houston streets, said Jay Blazek Crossley, a policy analyst at [Houston](#)

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**Tomorrow**, a nonprofit organization that examines urban issues in the region. One is the design of city streets, which he said prioritizes speed over safety. The other is that the region has chosen to spend on toll roads over safer urban design, he said.

“Our money is focused on building toll roads in the middle of nowhere,” Crossley said. “Instead of redesigning streets with safety in mind, we’re putting our attention there.”

Crossley added that Houston has made some recent strides. In October, Mayor Annise Parker announced an **executive order** establishing a citywide Complete Streets policy aimed at protecting pedestrians, motorists, bicyclists and public transit riders.

According to the Texas Department of Transportation, 481 crashes resulted in 485 pedestrian deaths in the state in 2013. To date in 2014, there have been 164 pedestrian fatalities. An agency spokesman said TxDOT prioritizes safety and would like to reduce that number dramatically.

The coalition's report, published in conjunction with AARP, emphasizes the vulnerability of older people and people of color in pedestrian accidents. People who are 65 and older account for 12.6 percent of the total population, the report states, but account for 21 percent of all pedestrian fatalities. The report also notes that the fatality rate for people who are black is 60 percent higher than it is for non-Hispanic whites.

Nancy LeaMond, the executive vice president of social impact at AARP, said her group would reach out to more than 100 congressional offices in an effort to pass a comprehensive street safety bill.

“You shouldn’t need the speed of a major league baseball player just to cross the street,” LeaMond said. “Our streets should be designed to be safer so that most people will be able to cross the streets without crossing their fingers first.”

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