**Fiscal Facts: Traffic Deaths Surge in Milwaukee County While Falling Elsewhere**

Crash fatalities for Milwaukee County residents have steadily risen over time, with recent increases due in part to crashes in which excessive speed is a factor. This trend sharply contrasts with the rest of the state, where such fatalities have declined.

Statewide crash fatality data depict different realities along lines of geography, as well as race and ethnicity. Fatality rates for white Wisconsinites have declined long term; the opposite is true for Black residents. Hispanic Wisconsinites, meanwhile, have seen a more recent crash fatality surge.

The long-term divergence between Milwaukee County and the state's other 71 counties is particularly stark. Crash deaths in Milwaukee County increased 113.5% during the period from 2002 to 2022. Fatalities declined 36.1% in the balance of the state during this period.

Another divergence is among crash fatalities for which excessive speed is a factor. From 2002-2022, the number of speeding-involved crash fatalities in Milwaukee County increased from 15 to 47, or 213%. Meanwhile, speeding fatalities declined 55.1% in the balance of the state.

As part of this analysis, we selected a Milwaukee County peer group of eight large urban counties in other states. They are Allegheny (Pittsburgh), Cuyahoga (Cleveland), Erie (Buffalo), Hamilton (Cincinnati), Hennepin (Minneapolis), Jackson (Kansas City, Mo.), Marion (Indianapolis), and Wayne (Detroit).

Looking at overall motor vehicle fatality rates for residents of these counties, Milwaukee County ranks just slightly above average. Among Black residents, however, Milwaukee ranks well above the average. Milwaukee, Marion, Wayne, and Jackson counties all had similarly high fatality rates among Black residents relative to the other 5 counties.

While some of the trends documented in this report accelerated during the pandemic, many predate it. In February 2020, our research found there had been “a sharp increase in deaths of black Wisconsinites in motor vehicle crashes” from 2013 to 2018.

Since then, state and local policymakers increasingly have prioritized safer streets. Local leaders have launched a wide-ranging effort to re-engineer Milwaukee streets for safety, to add space for cyclists and pedestrians, and to increase police enforcement of driving violations. At the state level, lawmakers have passed, and Gov. Tony Evers has signed, a host of laws since 2023 to address reckless driving.

Still, these trends show that crash fatality trends in Milwaukee County continue to merit concern and action. Milwaukee-area officials continue to seek authorization from state lawmakers to deploy additional enforcement tools, including red-light cameras.

Recent responses from policymakers show they are taking the problem seriously. But additional steps may be required to put the region on a trajectory toward safer streets.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*