

# CASE STUDY:

# The Deadliest Roads in Florida

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Despite advances in automobile safety and highway regulations, traffic fatalities remain on the rise, with no real end in sight. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), there were 35,092 traffic fatalities in the US in 2015 – a 7.2 percent increase from the previous year, the largest single-year increase since 1966.

The third most populous state in the country, Florida is a significant contributor to those numbers – in 2015, Florida saw 2,939 fatalities, accounting for 8.4 percent of all traffic fatalities in the US.

These deaths occurred across 2,699 fatal crashes, seemingly evenly dispersed across road types and counties. To determine where exactly the deadliest roads were in Florida, we consulted data

visualization firm 1Point21 Interactive for their insights.

Through our analysis, we discovered that from 2013-2015, 1501 traffic fatalities occurred across just 97 specific stretches of Florida roads. Expanding this to state-level data, over 19 percent of all traffic fatalities in Florida occurred across roughly 568 miles of road.

## **The Deadliest Road Segments in Florida**

### **Why We Commissioned This Study**

SteinLaw personal injury attorneys know the impact of sudden tragedy on a person's life. Just one unfortunate incident or unforeseen accident can turn a person's world upside-down, and profoundly impact their quality of life for the future.

There's no telling what everyday occurrences can result in harm, injury, or even death – and as personal advocates for your wellbeing, we want to prevent any injury and harm from affecting you and your loved ones. Even daily activities like driving can be life-changers if you make the wrong turn, so we're here to make sure you make informed decisions when you're behind the wheel.

### Insights

- The Little River neighborhood of Miami topped the list with 27 fatalities across a 3.85-mile stretch of the Interstate 95 Express lane – a staggering rate of 7.01 fatalities-per-mile.
- Interstate 95, one of the busiest freeways in Florida, had the highest amount of

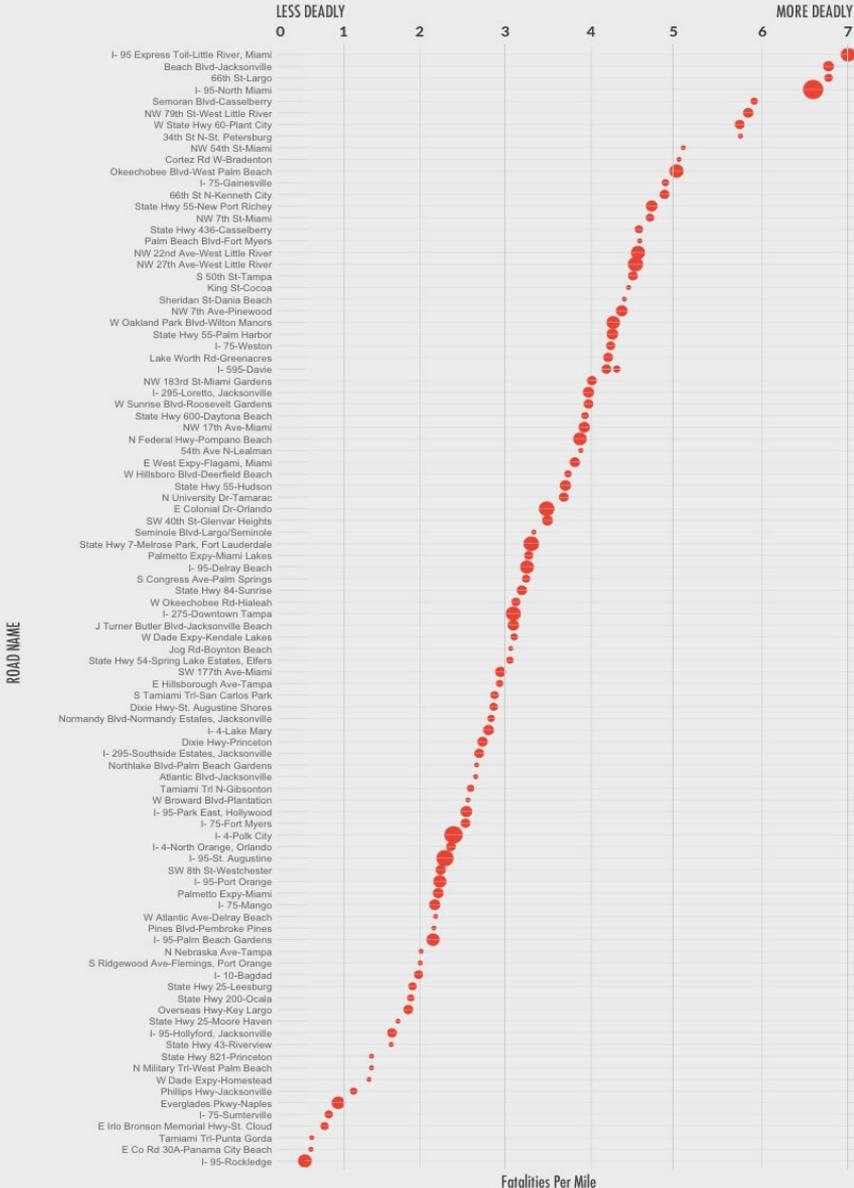
deadly road sections, totaling 240 fatalities across just 108.06 miles.

- Miami-Dade County contains the road with the highest fatalities-per-mile, the road with the highest fatalities, and the road with the most fatal crashes. With 4.57 fatalities-per-mile, Pinellas County tops the list among all Florida Counties

# DEADLIEST OF THE DEADLY FLORIDA ROADS

Which deadly roads have the highest rate of fatalities per mile?

Total Fatalities ○○○○



## Miami and the I-95 Express Lane

Ranked by fatalities-per-mile, a 3.85-mile stretch of Miami freeway in the Little River neighborhood topped our list. The highway in question is the Interstate 95 Express Lane, a much-maligned toll road that's been the subject of high scrutiny and controversy.

The express lanes are separated by delineators – plastic poles intended to prevent drivers from going into the paid lanes. However, because these poles are flimsy, fragile, and do no damage to vehicles, the express lane has become a primary target for “lane-divers” – drivers who cut through from the regular freeway to avoid traffic.

This has spelled danger for those on the road. According to the Florida Highway

Patrol, in one three-year-period, there were 12,192 crashes in the county's express lanes – five included fatalities and 58 involved injuries.

In response to the danger, the Florida Department of Transportation has recently altered the delineators, changing them to more sturdy poles and reducing the space between them from 20 feet to ten feet (and then five feet, most recently).

However, it hasn't altered the behavior of lane-drivers significantly – the state still loses 600 of these poles a week to damage. Some even argue it makes the express lane more dangerous, due to the reduced sightlines from tighter spacing between poles.

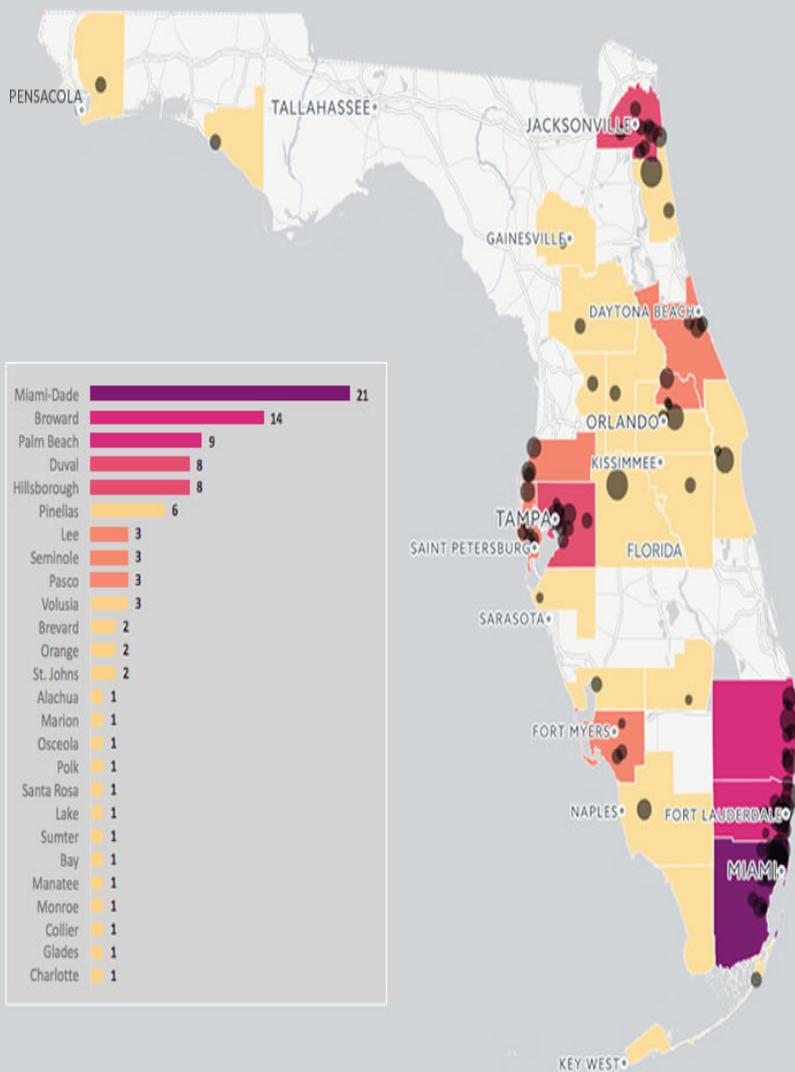
The danger is so prevalent that both South Florida lawmakers and the Florida Highway

Patrol have denounced the poles dividing the lanes, going so far as to say they do nothing to stop lane-diving. In fact, in 2017 Florida State Senator Frank Artiles had filed a bill proposing a ban to express lanes in Florida.

Nevertheless, the Florida DOT persists in operating them – even expanding the program to include express lanes in other freeways across South Florida.

# Deadly Roads by County in Florida

Counties that have at least 1 deadly stretch of road or highway



## Miami-Dade County

With a population of 2.7 million, Miami-Dade County is the state's most populous county – so it's not surprising that they also have the highest number of deadly highway stretches, fatal crashes, and fatalities. From 2013-2015, the county had 369 fatalities spanning just 21 stretches of road 101.93 miles long.

It's important to note, also, that 12 of the 21 stretches occurred on city roads. Local roads frequently rank high when it comes to fatal crashes – in 2015, more than 22 percent of all fatal crashes in Florida occurred on local roads, second only to state routes, according to the FLHSMV. Additionally, a good portion of fatalities seem to occur in impoverished neighborhoods. For example, the West Little River region of Miami-Dade shows up

alongside more highly-populated areas such as Hialeah and Miami proper, although it's a relatively small urban residential area housing 34,699 people. The median income for a household in West Little River is \$26,686, and the median income for a family is \$29,013. Nearly a quarter of families live well below the poverty line.

Studies have shown that poorer neighborhoods are more prone to dangerous car accidents, typically due to less safe road designs and poor pedestrian safety guidance.

### Broward County - Ft. Lauderdale and Arterial Roads

Broward County ranks second in the state for number of deadly road segments with 14, and third in total fatalities-per-mile at

3.47. That's no surprise: in 2015, Broward tallied 38,409 crashes and 221 fatalities, second only to Miami-Dade County.

A 2.28-mile stretch of Sheridan Street is the deadliest in Broward, at 4.39 fatalities-per-mile. Also known as Florida State Road 822, this road segment borders Dania Beach and Hollywood. A major arterial roadway, it provides a convenient connecting route between I 95 and US Highway 1, which both have reputations as two of the most dangerous highways in Florida.

Fort Lauderdale is the home to the longest road segment identified in our study, a 9.09-mile portion of State Road 7 that also has the most fatalities, known more commonly as US-441. Located near the Melrose Park neighborhood, this stretch of road had 29 fatal crashes, resulting in 30

fatalities. Another arterial highway, US Route 441 gets roughly 48,000 drivers daily, being one of the major urban corridor to numerous residential neighborhoods, shopping centers, and points of entertainment.

Although the high amount of traffic should be taken into consideration, there may be other undiscovered factors that contribute to the danger of US-441.

### Pinellas County – Home to the Most Dangerous Road in Florida

Although Pinellas County has a modest population, its traffic fatalities remain consistently high. In fact, with 74 fatalities happening in just six stretches of highway totaling 16.21 miles of road, Pinellas tops all counties in fatalities-per-mile, at 4.57 –

nearly one whole fatality-per-mile higher than Miami-Dade County.

The main reason for this is U.S. Route 19. One of the most heavily traveled roads in Florida, a 34-mile-stretch through Pinellas County has been notorious for its dangerous road conditions for more than a decade. A five-year study from 1998-2003 by the Florida Highway Patrol (in conjunction with Dateline NBC) discovered that the highway was responsible for roughly 52 deaths annually, and a Dateline NBC piece deemed it the most dangerous road in America in 2005.

Of the six stretches of deadly road in Pinellas County, all of them are closely associated with U.S. Route 19. For example, 34<sup>th</sup> Street North is a section of U.S Route 19 that serves as an arterial roadway, and State Road 55 is a “secret”

designation of Route 19. The remaining stretches serve as alternative routes or major cross streets of the highway.

### **What makes Route 19 so dangerous?**

- **High traffic.** The major road attracts roughly 80,000 drivers daily. In 2016, some stretches even had average daily traffic of over 100,000 drivers, according to the Florida Department of Transportation.
- Parts of U.S. Route 19 can vary greatly in width and speed, some parts being more traditional highway, and others resembling more of an arterial urban corridor. These differences come with vastly varying speed limits – a speed limit of 45 mph can commonly increase to a cruising limit of 70 mph, and vice versa. Within those urban roads are also storefronts and

shopping centers directly off of the highway, resulting in numerous cars slowing down to enter and exit driveways and parking lots.

- **Pedestrian safety – or lack thereof.** Crosswalks are littered throughout the urban sections of U.S. Route 19, but can be across as many as 8 lanes, all containing vehicles traveling at high speeds.

According to a 2016 Traffic Crash Trends and Conditions Report by non-profit advocacy group Forward Pinellas, driver safety in the county seems to be improving in areas, but rapidly decreasing in others – particularly pedestrians. Although total fatalities had a five-year decrease of 12 percent, total pedestrian fatalities had a five-year increase of 18 percent.

In fact, the study shows that, in 2014 and 2015, Pinellas County had the highest pedestrian fatalities per capita among all Florida counties – and 80 percent above the national average from 2011-2015. With major arterial roads cutting through suburban-developments meant for smaller surface streets, these alarming numbers are certainly a cause for concern and further investigation.

### Orange County & Orlando – Theme Park Capital of the World

Orange County, home to “The Theme Park Capital of the World,” is arguably the major tourist hub of Florida. Although our analysis only contains two stretches of deadly highway in Orlando, these two roads are undoubtedly very dangerous. With 44 fatalities across two portions of road 14.55 miles long, Orange County had

3.02 fatalities-per-mile – higher than that of Palm Beach County, which has nearly five times as many stretches of deadly road. Most Orlando residents and visitors are familiar with both stretches of road.

- **East Colonial Drive.** Often thought to be the “Main Street” of Orlando, this is one of the main arterial east-west roads in Central Florida, connecting two of the busiest freeways in the state, Interstate 4 and Interstate 95.
- **Interstate 4.** One of the first interstate highways in Florida, this highway is the main point of access for tourists, cutting directly through downtown Orlando – and through most of the world-famous theme parks south of downtown.

Ultimately, tourism seems to be a main contributor to danger on these major

roads. In 2016, Orlando had a record 68 million visitors – up from 66 million in 2015. Taking into consideration that nearly 113 million tourists visited the state in 2016, that’s over 60% of all visitors to the Sunshine State.

This surge of visitors certainly shows on Orange County’s roads: in 2016, East Colonial Drive served nearly 60,000 drivers daily, and Interstate 4 saw an unbelievable daily average of 201,000 drivers.

The state is heading in the right direction to alleviate the traffic here – a road-widening project has increased the number of lanes on East Colonial Drive from four to six, and the “I-4 Ultimate” project is a six-year initiative started in 2015 to rebuild 21 miles of interstate, including replacing more than 140 bridges.

Unfortunately, the construction may have resulted in less safe road conditions – at least temporarily. Closed lanes and poorly displayed signage frustrated drivers on East Colonial Drive, and a year into construction, the I-4 Ultimate project has actually increased a motorists' chances of crashing by 12 percent.

With the tourism industry surging in Florida as the economy improves, these heightened chances of danger on the road may be worthwhile if it means safer roads for years to come.

### Methodology and Data Sources

Our geospatial analysis utilized Florida traffic fatality data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for the three years

spanning 2013-2015. Because Florida is a state inundated with high-traffic arterial roads, data from local roads were also included with interstate and highway data.

We included all stretches with more than 10 fatalities during this time period, and then ranked them by fatalities per mile. Road stretches vary by length due to our analysis of fatality clusters in 2.5-mile portions. That is, the stretches run until the road goes more than 2.5 miles without a fatality.

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