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Technical Report

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California Traffic Safety Study - 2023

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2023 marked the fourteenth year of the California Office of Traffic Safety's (OTS) Annual Traffic Safety Study. The study is intended to create a better understanding of trends in traffic safety behaviors and help focus traffic safety programs, which include enforcement efforts along with public education campaigns to ensure they are effective in targeting areas with disproportionate traffic safety injuries. The survey is sponsored by the OTS and administered by Ewald and Wasserman Research Consultants, along with University of California Berkeley Safe Transportation Research and Education Center (SafeTREC).

The 2023 wave of data collection for the statewide traffic safety survey was conducted with an online panel of California drivers instead of an intercept interview, as were previous waves of data collection. The survey questions and data analysis of survey items presented in this report are largely similar to previous waves of the survey, including survey items on traffic safety opinions and knowledge on traffic safety campaigns, distracted driving and perceptions about pedestrian and bicycle traffic interactions. In 2022, the survey underwent a revision with new survey items added to gain understanding of opinions about the Safe System approach, which was introduced by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT).

The participants for the online survey panel were obtained through Qualtrics, a commercial panel vendor utilizing multiple subcontractors, to provide a representative cross-section of pre-screened and qualified respondents. SafeTREC paid attention to matching age and gender distributions with previous years. Below are the results from the 2023 California Traffic Safety Public Opinion Study. Overall, 2,815 eligible panelists completed the online survey in 2023. Panelists consisted of California drivers who were forwarded to an online survey portal. The criteria for eligibility included a valid California driver's license and being at least 18 years of age. Numbers in the tables below may not add to 100% due to rounding error.

View [the full report](#) at the SafeTREC website.

Q1. In your opinion, what are the biggest safety problems on California roadways?

Reply	Percent
Speeding/Aggressive Driving	19.7%
Distracted Driving because of TEXTING	19.0%
Drunk Driving	17.6%
Bad Road Surfaces	12.6%
Drugged Driving	10.8%
Distracted Driving because of TALKING	7.8%
All other responses combined	12.4%
Total	100%

In 2023, 19.7% of respondents cited “Speeding/Aggressive Driving” as the biggest safety problem on California roadways, followed by “Distracted Driving because of texting” (19.0%) and “Drunk Driving” (17.6%).

Q2. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, what is the biggest change in behaviors you have noticed from drivers?

Reply	Percent
Aggressive Driving/Road Rage	33.8%
Have Not Noticed any Changes	21.1%
Speeding	16.2%
Distracted Driving because of Talking and/or Texting	19.1%
Impaired Driving	6.0%
Not Wearing Seatbelts	2.3%
Other	1.4%
Total	100%

Respondents were asked to identify the biggest change they have noticed in driver behavior.

“Aggressive Driving/Road Rage” was the most frequently given response as the biggest behavioral change noticed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to 2022, “Aggressive Driving/ Road Rage” had a decrease in responses from 34.7% to 33.8%.

Q3. In your opinion, what is the most serious distraction for drivers?

Reply	Percent
Texting or Checking Phone While Driving	72.4%
Talking on Phone While Driving	15.0%
Car Crashes causing Rubbernecking	4.3%
Passengers in Car	2.5%
Eating While Driving	2.1%
Dashboard/Navigation Systems	2.1%
Roadside Billboards	0.8%
All other responses combined	0.9%
Total	100%

Since 2013 “Texting or Checking Phone While Driving” has remained the most frequently given answer as the most serious distraction for drivers.

Q4. How often in the past 30 days have you used an electronic wireless device in a non-hands-free manner, like a cell phone when driving?

Reply	Percent
Regularly	13.2%
Sometimes	17.5%
Rarely	27.3%
Never	42.0%
Total	100%

30.7% respondents in 2023 stated to have used an electronic wireless device in a non-hands-free manner regularly or sometimes.

Q5. Have you ever made a driving mistake while talking on a cell phone?

Reply	Percent
Yes	42.7%
No	57.3%
Total	100%

The majority (57.3%) of respondents reported having never made a driving mistake while using a cell phone with no significant change compared to 2022.

Q6. Have you ever been hit or nearly hit by a driver who was using a cell phone?

Reply	Percent
Yes	54.0%
No	46.0%
Total	100%

Over half (54.0%) of respondents reported being hit or nearly hit by a driver using a cell phone, a significant increase from 50.2% in 2022.

Q7. What do you think is the likelihood of being ticketed for hand-held cell phone use or texting?

Reply	Percent
Very likely	20.7%
Somewhat likely	29.2%
Neither likely or unlikely	16.0%
Somewhat unlikely	9.4%
Very unlikely	24.8%
Total	100%

In 2023, almost half (49.9%) of drivers said that it is “Very Likely” or “Somewhat Likely” to be ticketed for hand-held cell phone use.

Q8a. In the past six months, do you recall hearing or seeing “Go Safely California”

Reply	Percent
Yes	31.1%
No	68.9%
Total	100%

In 2023, 68.9% of respondents reported they did not recall hearing or seeing “Go Safely California”.

Q8b. In the past six months, do you recall hearing or seeing “Slow the Fast Down”?

Reply	Percent
Yes	21.5%
No	78.5%
Total	100%

In 2023, 78.5% of respondents reported they did not recall hearing or seeing “Slow the Fast Down”.

Q8c. In the past six months, do you recall hearing or seeing “Don’t Let Drunk or ‘High’ Drive”?

Reply	Percent
Yes	49.4%
No	50.6%
Total	100%

Over half (50.6%) of respondents reported they did not recall hearing or seeing “Don’t Let Drunk or ‘High’ Drive”.

Q9. In the past six months, did you drive when you thought you had too much alcohol to drive safely?

Reply	Percent
Yes	8.3%
No	64.6%
I do not drink at all	27.1%
Total	100%

In 2023, 64.6% of respondents said “No” to having driven when they thought they had too much alcohol to drive safely, a significant 4.4% decrease from 2022.

Q10. In the past six months, how often have you used a taxi or other ride service when drinking with others or alone?

Reply	Percent
Always	25.4%
Sometimes	21.8%
Rarely	14.6%
Never	38.2%
Total	100%

A total of 47.2% of respondents “Always” or “Sometimes” used alternate transportation while drinking with others or alone, compared to 43.3% respondents in 2022.

Q11. In the past six months, have you seen or heard anything about police setting up sobriety/DUI checkpoints to catch drunk drivers?

Reply	Percent
Yes	56.4%
No	43.6%
Total	100%

More than half (56.4%) of respondents have seen or heard about police sobriety or DUI checkpoints in the past six months, a 4.2% significant increase since 2022.

Q12. Did you know that you can get a DUI if you drive under the influence of legal or illegal drugs?

Reply	Percent
Yes	91.2%
No	8.8%
Total	100%

A large majority (91.2%) of respondents said they know it is possible to get a DUI by driving under the influence of legal or illegal drugs.

Q13. How likely is it for someone to get arrested if they drive impaired?

Reply	Percent
Very Likely	37.7%
Somewhat Likely	41.6%
Somewhat Unlikely	16.4%
Very Unlikely	4.8%
Total	100%

Overall, 79.3% of California drivers believed it to be “Very Likely” or “Somewhat Likely” to be arrested for driving impaired.

Q14. Do you think marijuana can impair driving related functions, such as reaction time, distance perception, lane tracking, coordination and balance?

Reply	Percent
Yes	77.8%
No	8.1%
It depends	14.1%
Total	100%

In 2023, 77.8% of respondents believed marijuana can impair driving functions, similar to 2022 data and previous waves of data collection.

Q15. How serious of a problem is driving under the influence of drugs, including marijuana, prescription or illegal?

Reply	Percent
Very big problem	50.6%
Somewhat of a problem	37.4%
A small problem	10.2%
Not a problem at all	1.7%
Total	100%

Half of respondents in 2023 replied that they thought driving under the influence of drugs, including marijuana, prescription or illegal is a serious problem. Another 37.4% said they think it is “Somewhat of a problem”.

Q16. Do you think it's safe to drive 10 miles over the speed limit on freeways?

Reply	Percent
Yes	32.7%
No	26.8%
It depends	40.5%
Total	100%

In 2023, 32.7% said they think it is safe to drive 10 miles over the speed limit on freeways. 40.5% says that “It depends”.

Q17. Do you think it's safe to drive over the speed limit on residential streets?

Reply	Percent
Yes	9.0%
No	76.7%
It depends	14.3%
Total	100%

The majority (76.7%) respondents believe it is unsafe to drive over the speed limit on residential streets, with an increase from 73.9% compared in 2022.

Q18. What do you think the chances are of getting a ticket if you drive over the speed limit on residential streets?

Reply	Percent
Very likely	25.7%
Somewhat likely	38.0%
Somewhat unlikely	25.8%
Very unlikely	10.5%
Total	100%

In 2023, 63.7% of respondents thought the chance of getting a ticket for driving over the speed limit on residential streets were “Very likely” or “Somewhat likely”, similar to results in 2022.

Q19. In a typical week, what is your main form of transportation?

Reply	Percent
Mostly Drive	79.8%
Mostly Walk	7.9%
Mostly Ride a Bike	3.3%
Mostly Ride a Motorcycle/Scooter	2.2%
Mostly take Public Transit	4.0%
Mostly use Ride Share Services/ Taxis/Ride as a passenger	2.3%
Other	0.5%
Total	100%

In a typical week, 79.8% respondents said their main form of transportation was driving. 7.9% said walking was their main mode.

Q20. Do you think it is legal for bicyclists to ride on roadways when there is no bike lane?

Reply	Percent
Yes	68.0%
No	32.0%
Total	100%

A majority of respondents (68.0%) said they think it is legal for bicyclists to ride on roadways when there is no bike lane.

Q21. When driving how comfortable are you with sharing the road with bicyclists when there IS a designated bike lane?

Reply	Percent
Very comfortable	28.6%
Somewhat comfortable	35.6%
Somewhat uncomfortable	23.1%
Very uncomfortable	12.8%
Total	100%

Combined, 64.2% of respondents were “Very comfortable” or “Somewhat comfortable” sharing the road with bicyclists when there is a bike lane, compared to 65.2% in 2022.

Q22. In what situation would you feel most comfortable sharing the road with bicyclists while driving?

Reply	Percent
When there is a protected bike lane divider	54.5%
Where there is a bike lane with painted dividers	32.6%
Where there is no bike lane at all	5.8%
Other	0.6%
I don't feel comfortable sharing the road with bicyclists under any circumstances	6.5%
Total	100%

In 2023, we added the question “In what situation would you feel most comfortable sharing the road with bicyclists when driving” and provided a list of multiple choice options. Most respondents (54.5%) said, “When there is a protected bike lane divider,” 32.6% said “When there is a bike lane with painted dividers,” and 5.8% said “When there is no bike lane at all.”

Q23. Think of the times you have been a pedestrian or bicyclist in the last six months. What safety problems did you experience, if any?

Reply	Percent
Cars going too fast	21.5%
Cars not stopping	20.0%
Distracted drivers (cell phones)	15.4%
Lots of traffic	10.4%
Lack of sidewalks/bike lanes	9.8%
Almost getting hit by a car or bike	9.8%
Bicyclists not stopping	8.5%
None of the above	2.2%
Have not been a pedestrian or bicyclist in the past 6 months	1.9%
All other responses combined	0.4%
Total	100%

The most reported safety problems experienced by respondents when they have been pedestrians or bicyclists in the last six months are “Cars going too fast” (21.5%), followed by “Cars not stopping” (20.0%) and “Distracted drivers” (15.4%).

Q24. Think of the times you have been a driver around pedestrians and bicyclists in the last six months. What safety problems did you experience, if any?

Reply	Percent
Pedestrians not using crosswalks	18.0%
Pedestrians stepping off curb without looking	16.1%
Cyclists not stopping at stop signs or traffic lights	14.8%
Pedestrians/cyclists distracted behavior (phones, ear pods, headsets)	13.7%
Pedestrians/cyclists not being visible enough	12.6%
Cyclists being in the road or blocking traffic	11.1%
Lack of sidewalks or clear crosswalks	10.6%
None	2.7%
Other responses combined	0.3%
Total	100%

The three most frequent responses to the question about safety problems experienced by driving near pedestrians or bicyclists in the last six months included “Pedestrians not using crosswalks” (18.0%), “Pedestrians stepping off the curb without looking” (16.1%) and “Cyclists not stopping at stop signs or traffic lights” (14.8%).

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