

road safety issues

Northland Region

Land Transport New Zealand has prepared this road safety issues report. It is based on reported crash data and trends for the 2000–2004 period. The intent of the report is to highlight the key road safety issues and be a resource to identify possible ways to reduce the number of road deaths and injuries in the Northland Region.

Northland Region is the ninth largest in New Zealand by population. However, the region has the second highest rate of crashes per kilometre travelled on the open road state highways. A high proportion of Northland Region crashes (73 percent) occur on the open road.

In 2004, the social cost of crashes in the Northland Region reduced to \$208 million, down from \$222 million in 2003. Fatal crashes decreased in 2004 but the number of serious injuries was the highest in 10 years.

Over the period 2000–2004, nearly 3,000 people were injured in Northland Region crashes and 810 of these suffered serious injury or death. Crashes in the Far North District made up 45 percent of the total, with 40 percent in the Whangarei District and 15 percent in the Kaipara District. Crashes on local authority roads accounted for over half (54 percent) of the 2004 total.

The most common crash type on the open road was loss of control. On urban roads, it was intersection crashes, closely followed by loss of control. Common factors were excessive speed, road factors, drink-driving, poor observation and pedestrian factors.

Major road safety issues

Northland Region

- Loss of control on curves
- Alcohol
- Speed
- Road and environment factors

Nationally

- Speed
- Alcohol
- Failure to give way
- Restraints



2004 road trauma for Northland Region



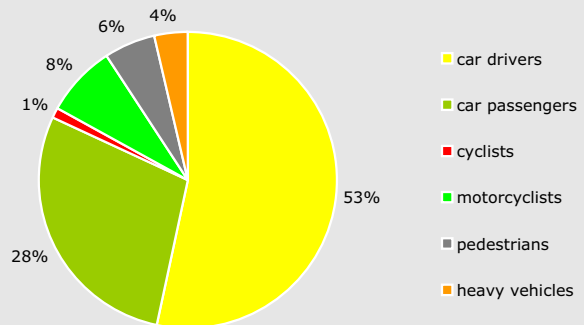
| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Deaths | 30 |
| Serious casualties | 148 |
| Minor casualties | 554 |



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| Fatal crashes | 23 |
| Serious injury crashes | 118 |
| Minor injury crashes | 376 |
| Non-injury crashes | 995 |

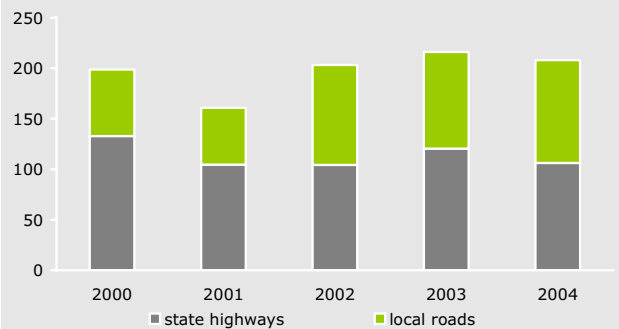
Fatal and serious casualties

User type 2000–2004



Estimated social cost of crashes*

Social cost (\$ million)



*The estimated social cost includes loss of life or life quality (estimated by the amount New Zealanders are prepared to pay to reduce their risk of fatal or non-fatal injury), loss of output due to injuries, medical and rehabilitation costs, legal and court costs, and property damage. These costs are expressed at June 2004 prices.

Loss of control on curves

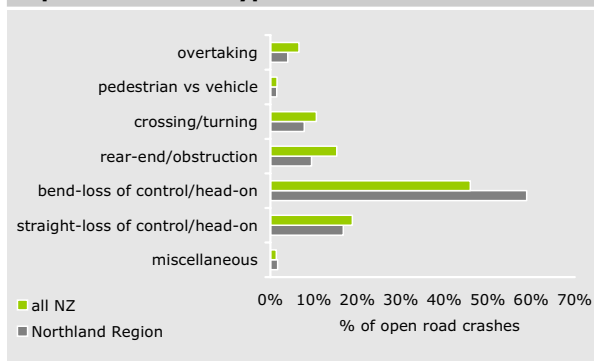
Loss of control on curves is an ongoing problem on Northland Region roads and is the most common crash type in the region. This crash type accounted for 59 percent of all open road crashes and 23 percent of urban crashes (around 183 injury and fatal crashes each year), over the last five years.

Most (85 percent) of the loss of control crashes occurred on the open road. A high proportion of these crashes were at night. From 2000 to 2004, December was clearly the peak month for night-time crashes despite the longer summer daylight hours.

The most common driver age group involved in this crash type was 15 to 19 year olds, but the age of drivers does not really taper off until past 45 years. Drivers involved were usually male.

Common contributing factors to these crashes were the road itself, in terms of a wet or slippery surface, and driver factors of drink-driving, excessive speed for the conditions and poor handling of the vehicle. These contributing factors have shown up more frequently in crash reports over the past few years.

Open road crash type 2000–2004



Crashes on the extensive unsealed road network have increased significantly recently, mainly in the Far North and Kaipara districts. Unsealed road crash types were dominated by drivers losing control of their vehicle on curves.

After loss of control, vehicles can crash into roadside objects, which can increase the severity of injuries to vehicle occupants. These collisions were common in Northland Region. Roadside objects were struck in 290 crashes in 2004 and were involved in 65 percent of the open road crashes. Narrow road widths and narrow shoulders allow limited space for recovery if a driver loses control. Vehicles often end up in roadside ditches or crash into banks or trees when they leave the road.

Alcohol

Drinking and driving has traditionally been a common problem in the Northland Region. Crashes that have alcohol as a contributing factor made up 32 percent of the region's serious injury and fatal crashes between 2000 and 2004. This figure is considerably higher than all other regions in New Zealand; the next highest region is Bay of Plenty at 27 percent, followed by Gisborne at 25 percent.

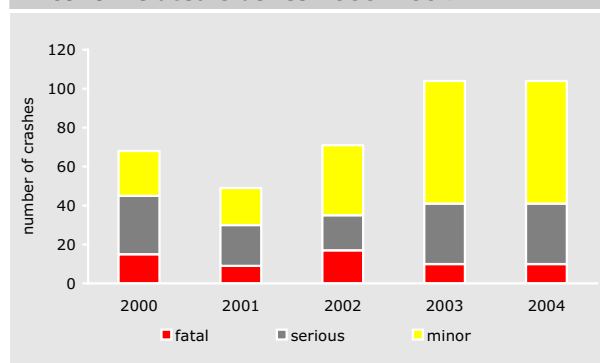
Drink-driving was a problem on its own but further compounded by other road safety issues identified in this report. Local communities can have an influence in reducing the level of drink-driving among their families, friends, and neighbours. They can be involved in educational and advertising programmes, provide input to roading solutions and support enforcement action.

In 2004, alcohol-related crashes on both the urban streets of the region and the open road reached their highest figures since 1995. Together, the total for 2004 was 103 alcohol-related crashes resulting in injury or death.

The Far North District has a particularly high incidence of drink-driving, accounting for 52 percent of the region's alcohol-related crashes. Alcohol as a factor in Far North District crashes has been increasing and accounted for 22 percent of all open road casualty crashes (including minor injury crashes) in 2004. The Police are using their Traffic Alcohol Group (TAG) to develop a higher presence in the Far North District and changes are becoming evident.

Drunk drivers in Northland Region crashes were most commonly between 15 and 35 years old. Males made up 80 percent of the offending drivers in alcohol-related crashes.

Alcohol-related crashes 2000–2004



Alcohol-related crashes are spread throughout the year but tend to peak over the summer months in the Far North District.

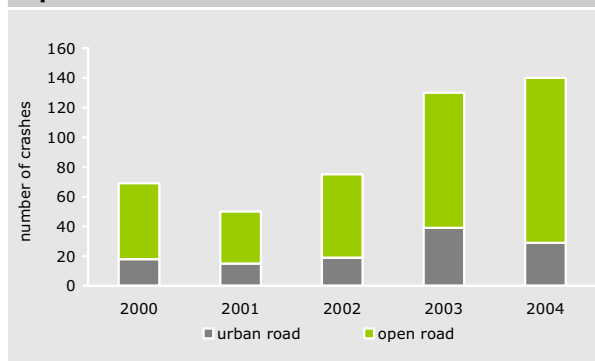
Although weekends and late nights often featured strongly, crashes were generally spread over a wide time period and not restricted to the late night/early morning period.

Speed

Speed as a factor in Northland Region crashes increased over the past two years to nearly double the average of the previous three years. It was a factor in nearly half (45 percent) of all fatal crashes in the past five years.

Recorded figures indicate that five percent of drivers exceed 110 km/h on the open road in the Northland Region and 13 percent exceed 60 km/h on urban roads. In a 2004 attitude survey, 76 percent of Northlanders agreed with the statement that speed enforcement helps to lower the road toll.

Speed-related crashes 2000–2004



While speed can be interpreted as exceeding the speed limit, it is a strong contributor to crashes where the appropriate speed may actually be less than the speed limit. The Northland Region's most common crash type was a driver losing control of their vehicle on a curve. In many cases, the driver will have exceeded the appropriate speed for negotiating the curve but not the speed limit.

At any particular site, the appropriate speed can vary across a day or a year depending on weather conditions, the time of day, road surface condition, vehicle type, the condition of the driver and the presence of other vehicles or road users. The appropriate speed will also vary between different locations on the road network depending on road alignment, skid resistance, visibility and gradient, as well as the previously mentioned factors.

Taking this into account, there were 138 crashes in the Northland Region in 2004 where excessive speed for the conditions contributed to the crash. Excessive speeds contributed to 19 percent of urban crashes and 26 percent of open road crashes in the region.

More specifically, for loss of control crashes only, excessive speed contributed to 36 percent of this crash type on open roads in the Northland Region.

Road and environment factors

Road and environment factors can contribute to crashes, particularly those that involve loss of control of the vehicle. Road and environment factors have been increasingly identified in crashes – they were the second most common contributing factors in open road crashes and were also over-represented in urban crashes between 2000 and 2004. Road and environment factors also contributed to previously mentioned issues such as loss of control on curves, excessive speed and drink-driving.

A slippery road was the most common road factor reported. A slippery surface can be due to rain, loose material, an unsealed road surface, a worn surface, mud, oil or other contaminants on the road.

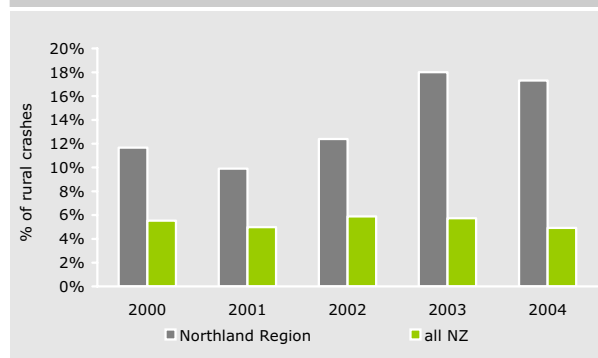
These factors usually become evident during wet weather, particularly when wet weather follows a long dry spell and contaminants have built up on the road surface. A slippery surface due to loose metal was a common crash factor on local roads, especially in the Kaipara and Far North Districts. Crashes reported on unsealed rural roads more than doubled over the past two years.

Roadwork sites commonly have unsealed or slippery road surfaces. It is important that roadwork sites are consistent and well-managed to warn motorists of the specific hazards. Work sites must be authorised by the road controlling authority, either the district council or Transit New Zealand, and monitored for compliance. Drivers need to be especially aware and adjust their speed when driving through roadwork sites.

Crashes at night are becoming more common. In 2004, the proportion of crashes at night was 35 percent in urban areas and 36 percent on the open road. Roadside objects were another environmental factor that contributed to Northland Region crashes.

Narrow road widths, narrow shoulders and limited clear space on the roadside can mean a solid object such as a ditch, bank, tree or pole is struck if a driver loses control, increasing the chance of serious injury. Ditches, cliffs and trees were the most frequently struck objects in crashes on rural roads of the region.

Crashes on unsealed rural roads 2000–2004



Road environment

The Land Transport New Zealand crash reduction monitoring database shows that works implemented as a result of crash reduction studies have been very successful and reduced crashes at the study sites by 51 percent in the Northland Region (56 percent at state highway sites and 44 percent at local road sites).

Not all recommendations from studies have been completed; 28 percent of the recommendations are still to be fully implemented. Recommendations should be implemented by the road controlling authorities as soon as possible to ensure further crash reductions.

Analysis of the crashes at all completed sites should be undertaken regularly to ensure that safety has been improved and sites re-examined if no improvement has occurred. Ongoing crash reduction studies should be scheduled to build on the success achieved to date.

Where to get more information

For more specific information relating to road crashes in Northland Region, please refer to the 2000 to 2004 road safety data report, the Land Transport New Zealand crash analysis system or contact the office listed below right.

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