



## Deaths on Staten Island hit a record low: Traffic strategies saving lives

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Pedestrian countdowns, redesigned intersections and roads, and traffic enforcement efforts appear to have turned the tide and made Staten Island a less deadly place to drive.

The streets here may not be getting any more civil, but traffic fatalities have plummeted to their lowest rate in 2011 since the city started keeping borough-specific statistics in 1983.

In all, 11 people died in crashes on Staten Island last year, compared to 26 in 2010. And though the numbers aren't shaping up to be quite as low in 2012, they're progressing along a similar track -- police here have responded to seven fatal crashes since the beginning of the year.



Staten Island Advance/Anthony DePrimo

Pedestrians make their way across Hylan Boulevard at New Dorp Lane amid drivers making turns in New Dorp. The intersection was once notorious for fatal accidents but statistics show fatalities have dropped in recent years. Anthony DePrimo

City Department of Transportation officials credit the drop to an array of engineering changes and traffic initiatives, including pedestrian countdown signs and redesigns of dangerous intersections like Hylan Boulevard and Steuben Street.

On Hylan Boulevard, for example, the city has prohibited left turns at many busy intersections. Digital message signs along Richmond Avenue warn motorists when they're breaking the speed limit. And police have rolled out a series of crackdowns in recent years, focusing on Hylan Boulevard in particular.

### 'NON-STOP CAMPAIGN'

"In the classroom and on the street, our nonstop campaign to make our streets safer is making a real difference in the everyday lives of New Yorkers," DOT Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan.

"We must continue taking aggressive steps to retain these hard-won safety gains and will continue to work with

the borough's communities and elected officials to make our streets even safer for all Staten Islanders here and across the city."

The 2011 deaths stem from 10 separate incidents across the Island.

Three involved pedestrians, of a sort -- a freak accident where a man sledded into traffic; another incident on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge where two men were struck after getting out of their vehicles; and the suicide of a 15-year-old girl who jumped in front of a city bus.

This year's accidents include four fatal encounters between cars and pedestrians, a hit-and-run that killed a cyclist, a motorcycle crash, and a motor vehicle crash.

Jonathan Peters, a professor of finance and a demographer at the College of Staten Island who closely follows population and traffic trends on the Island, cautions against reading too much into the drop in fatalities.

#### REMAINING CAUTIOUS

"The reality is that there's a random component of it," Peters says, noting that a crash like this past April's van plunge in the Bronx, which resulted in the death of seven people, could double the numbers overnight. "You don't want to ignore these changes, but you don't want to over-analyze them.

"Things like prom season, things like the summer holiday weekends tend to be pretty dangerous," he adds.

With advancements in car safety like air bags, and with many drivers getting behind the wheel of SUVs and other heavier vehicles, he says, data shows fatalities city-wide have skewed more towards pedestrian accidents.

"The pedestrians are not as well protected today," he says. "The better and safer the cars are, the more aggressively people drive."

The numbers aside, motorists here still see the Island's roads as inhospitable, filled with aggressive, inconsiderate and potentially dangerous drivers.

On a recent afternoon, a cacophony of horns blared at the corner of Hylan Boulevard and New Dorp Lane, which routinely ranks among the borough's most accident-prone intersections.

In the span of just a few minutes, more than a dozen drivers blasted their car horns, mainly to express displeasure at someone who didn't take a turn fast enough, or who slowed down to assess whether a group of teens would try to cross illegally.

#### INSTANT RESULTS

#### Dramatic decline

There were 11 traffic fatalities in 2011, the fewest ever recorded since borough-specific data has been kept, and a 58 percent decline from the 26 fatalities that occurred in 2010.

Year	Traffic fatalities
2000	24
2001	31
2002	22
2003	28
2004	23
2005	21
2006	24
2007	16
2008	18
2009	21
2010	26
2011	11
2012	7

Traffic enforcement agents from the NYPD regularly control the flow of cars as the students at nearby New Dorp High School pour out for dismissal.

And sure enough, once the traffic agents arrive, the blare of horns die down, to be replaced by the occasional tweet of a police whistle, or a loud, sharply-worded command to a driver trying to take a turn without permission.

"If they didn't have the traffic people assisting, it would be worse than what it is now," said Laura Delan, of West Brighton, who drives to New Dorp for work every day.

Ms. Delan said she was "shocked," based on what she's seen of the Island's streets, that the fatality numbers dipped so low last year.

"You're just marking the ones where people have fatalities. There are so many accidents that don't have fatalities," she said. "I'm sure a lot of it still has to do with people who are on their cell phones."

Last year, New Dorp Lane and Hylan Boulevard ranked as the third most dangerous intersection on the Island, with 54 crashes, though none fatal.

Still, that's a far cry from the early-to-mid 2000s -- between 2002 and 2004, 13 pedestrians were killed or injured at that intersection, and the summer of 2006 saw three fatalities there.

That spurred city transportation officials and the NYPD to step up its safety efforts at Hylan and New Dorp -- including adding pedestrian fencing, extended medians, signs, more visible crosswalks and a "pedestrian refuge island." And so far, the intersection hasn't seen a fatality since 2006.

Despite the drop in fatalities, Lillian Lagazzo of Grant City says she tries to avoid intersections like Hylan and New Dorp whenever possible.

"I don't trust people's instincts. They try to beat the light," she says.

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