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Britain Reduces Traffic Fatalities by Half While U.S. Shows Little Change

With Same Reduction as Britain, U.S. Would Save 20,000 Lives per Year

If the U.S. could reduce traffic facilities as much as Great Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales) has over the past 30 years, 20,000 fewer people would lose their lives every year in the U.S. The economic cost of the failure to achieve this reduction is estimated at about $70 billion per year, more than the cost of congestion to the U.S. economy.

According to recent figures released by the U.K. Department for Transport, the number of people killed on British roads in 2004 was the lowest since records were first kept in 1926. Over the past 30 years, traffic fatalities in Britain decreased from 6,883 to 3,221, a 53% reduction, whereas vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) has increased by an average of 2.6% per year. In the U.S. over the same period of time, traffic fatalities decreased from 45,196 to 42,636, a 6% reduction, whereas VMTs increased by an average of 2.7% per year. In 1974, the traffic fatality rate (fatalities per 100 million VMTs) in Britain was 34% higher than the U.S. rate (4.74 versus 3.53). Now the 2004 data show that the fatality rate in Britain is 29% lower than the present U.S. rate, at 1.03 versus 1.46.

What are the reasons for this major difference in the ability of these two countries to reduce traffic fatalities? Here are some possibilities:

- The percentage of speed-related crashes in the U.S. is estimated at 31%, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), compared with Britain's rate of 17%. Speed cameras are in widespread use in Britain whereas, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), only six states in the U.S. use speed cameras.
- Speed limits have increased in an estimated 76% of U.S. jurisdictions since 1994, according to a GHSA survey conducted earlier this year.

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Traffic Fatalities, Britain, U.S.

	Britain	U.S.
Vehicle Miles Traveled (Billions)		
1974	145	1,281
1984	192	1,720
1994	265	2,358
2004	312	2,923
Average increase per year, 1974–2004	2.6 %	2.7%
Traffic Fatalities		
1974	6,883	45,196
1984	5,599	44,257
1994	3,650	40,716
2004	3,221	42,636
Change in traffic fatalities, 1974–2004	–53%	–6%
Traffic Fatality Rate (fatalities per 100 million VMTs)		
1974	4.74	3.53
1984	2.92	2.57
1994	1.37	1.73
2004	1.03	1.46
Change in fatality rate, 1974–2004	–78%	–58%

Sources:
National Highway Traffic Administration; U.K. Department for Transport

Crash on U.S. highway. (Photo: Courtesy of the Florida's Turnpike Enterprise)

Inside

Metropolitan Travel Survey Archive Available as Off-Site Archive

Can Curb Loss of Valuable Data; Needs Additional Financial Support

The Metropolitan Travel Survey Archive, hosted by the University of Minnesota and funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is a valuable resource for transportation planning agencies whose funding is running short.

The archive operates as an off-site storage facility for storing travel survey data gathered by diverse agencies and is a potential storage locus for present survey data as well, according to David Levinson, associate professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Minnesota, who oversees the archive.

However, the archive may run out of funds within one year, which could disrupt valuable work that is being done to preserve travel survey data and accompanying documentation generated in earlier years. To ensure the continued existence of the archive, metropolitan planning

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Britain Reduces Traffic Fatalities by More Than Half

- The level of seat belt use is lower in the U.S. (82%) compared with Britain (91%). According to NHTSA, only 62% of those killed in traffic accidents in the U.S. used seat belts.
- Despite the fact that, according to NHTSA figures, drivers under age 25 years have the highest rate of involvement in fatal crashes of any age group in the U.S. on a per population basis, 42 states in the U.S. have a minimum age for a driver's license of only 16 years, 5 have a minimum age of only 15 years, and 1 (South Dakota) has a minimum age of 14 years. The minimum age for a driver's license in Britain is 18 years.
- In Britain, the use of a handheld mobile phone by a driver is illegal, whereas in the U.S. only 13 states have implemented any restrictions on the use of mobile phones while driving.
- Motorcycle fatalities have increased by 39% in the U.S. and 18% in Britain over the past three years. NHTSA reports that 3,661 motorcyclists were killed in traffic accidents in the U.S. in 2003.
- Traffic infractions incur higher fines in Britain than in the U.S. For example, drivers caught speeding in Britain face a minimum $100 fine and three penalty points on their record.

Curbing traffic fatalities remains a priority in Britain, with the government continuing to implement programs to achieve some ambitious goals in further reducing fatalities. The government appears to be on track for achieving those goals. The most recent goal set was a further 40% reduction in accidents by 2010.

The data reported above were gathered from NHTSA's Fatal Accident Reporting System (www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov), GHSA, the U.K. Department for Transport, and the International Road Traffic and Accident Database of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, of which the U.S. is a member. The U.K. report is available at www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_transstats/documents/page/dft_transstats_507487.hcsp.

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Metropolitan Travel Survey Archive

organizations (MPOs) and other transportation agencies might find it particularly cost-effective to pool funds in support of the archive. The necessary funds could be less than $1,000 per metropolitan area.

Public agencies, such as MPOs and state DOTs, can store travel survey data and accompanying files in the archive. Prof. Levinson indicated that over 30 agencies have posted databases along with relevant documentation for many regions.

Off-site archives are not only desirable but also are necessary to protect the substantial amount of funds that are invested in the planning, implementation, and analysis of a travel survey. Any disaster (fire, flooding, the destruction of a building where the data are presently held) can spell disaster in more ways than one if the data are not protected by means of an off-site archive.

Prof. Levinson recently requested all organizations that have travel survey data to contribute those data to the archive, including the survey results, any ancillary files (e.g., traffic zone boundaries shape files, transportation planning network files, GPS logs of subjects), and complete supporting documentation (including a description of the data structure as well reports that have analyzed the data) for any transportation survey conducted. He also requested that agencies spread the word about the archive to other organizations that might have conducted relevant surveys that are not listed in the archive.

In addition to making these databases publicly available, the university is also in the process of converting all the databases to a common format to enhance the readability and usability of each survey.

The archive in its present form has already been used by researchers. Data can potentially be used to

- Test the potential for model transferability
- Understand the differences between a present-day travel survey and a past survey and potentially eliminating errors through this comparison
- Conduct time-series analyses, which could provide valuable insight about the spatial development of a metropolitan area and associated travel patterns
- Test travel demand modeling through "backcasting" using historic data.

The archive may be accessed at www.surveyarchive.org. For more information, contact David Levinson, e-mail: levin031@umn.edu, or Elaine Murakami, the FHWA project manager of the Travel Survey Archive, tel. (206) 220-4460, e-mail: Elaine.Murakami@fhwa.dot.gov.

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