

# At A Glance: Priority Health Outcomes

## Transportation

The 2025-2028 Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) utilized insights from the 2022-2023 Delaware State Health Assessment (SHA) to identify five key health priorities based on health disparities throughout the state. The five priorities include chronic disease, mental health, maternal health, premature death, and avoidable injury. Insights from transportation planners and public health partners highlight the major contributors to transportation injuries, the communities most impacted, and the systemic opportunities for improvement. Delaware's small size and unified transportation management structure offer unique advantages, yet cultural, behavioral, and infrastructural challenges continue to shape transportation-related risks. The SHIP breaks down the avoidable injury priority into goals surrounding enhancing community safety, improving transportation, and promoting awareness of safety initiatives and resources. This edition of the *At a Glance* series aims to understand how transportation and health are closely linked in Delaware, following a conversation with Anson Gock, a transportation planner for the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT).

Transportation injuries in Delaware follow national trends of elevated crash and fatality rates when compared to other developed countries (DelDOT, 2025). These differences are not solely due to infrastructure quality, but also due to driver behavior and the limited rigor of driver education in the United States, according to Gock. Gock states that licensing requirements in the United States and Delaware are less strict than those in nations with stronger safety outcomes, such as Japan, where driving tests are more complex, and discipline is emphasized throughout the training process. Improvements in vehicle performance have also influenced driving habits, potentially encouraging higher speeds and more aggressive behaviors (DelDOT, 2025). During the COVID-19 pandemic, despite fewer vehicles on the road, Delaware and the nation saw increases in reckless driving, driving under the influence (DUI), and severe crashes, reflecting how rising trends of poor mental health may influence transportation safety (Steele, 2022).

Delaware's centralized transportation system positions the state to coordinate safety efforts effectively. Unlike most states, where city and county governments maintain the majority of roadways, DelDOT manages nearly 90% of roads statewide in Delaware. This structure enhances alignment between transportation, public health, and emergency response efforts. However, transportation injuries are not evenly distributed. High-crash corridors such as Route 13 are often located in low-income or immigrant communities (DelDOT, 2024). Gock also adds that these areas are more vulnerable to risk due to limited pedestrian infrastructure, higher traffic volumes, and fewer alternative travel options. Although Delaware is working to prioritize improvements in these corridors, resource limitations continue to constrain the pace of progress.

Several strategies can help reduce transportation-related injuries across the state. Gock discusses how Delaware has expanded the use of roundabouts, which reduce high-speed collisions and improve safety for all road users. These benefits, however, depend heavily on proper driver understanding, reinforcing the need for stronger driver education. This highlights the importance of reducing the need for travel altogether. Gock discusses how increased opportunities for remote work, expanded delivery services, and more home-based health care, particularly for older adults, can reduce vehicle miles traveled and thus decrease crash exposure. Integrating freight, transit, and passenger systems is also essential to ensure that all modes of transportation can operate safely together.

Transportation planning and public health are deeply interconnected. Beyond crash prevention, transportation systems influence air quality, physical activity, access to services, and overall community well-being (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2024). While the U.S. spends more on health care than any other nation, insufficient investment in preventive infrastructure, such as safe roads, walkable communities, and reliable transit, undercuts long-term health outcomes. Embedding transportation safety education within school curricula could help cultivate a more disciplined driving culture over time, improving understanding of right-of-way, roadway design, and the purpose of traffic regulations (CDC, 2024).

Looking ahead, improving transportation safety in Delaware will require a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Infrastructure alone cannot eliminate risk; driver behavior, community

norms, and education all play critical roles. Strengthening partnerships across state agencies, expanding preventive transportation planning, and engaging communities in safety initiatives will be essential to reducing transportation-related injuries. By investing in proactive strategies and fostering a culture of responsibility on the road, Delaware can continue to advance progress toward safer mobility for all residents.

## References

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**Delaware SHIP Stakeholder Interview with Dr. Alexandra Wynn, Kate Culhane-Suluai,  
and Anson Gock, Transportation Planner, Delaware Department of Transportation**

**Q: Can you start by telling us your name, your position, and how long you've worked in this role?**

**Anson Gock:** Sure. My name is Anson Gock, and I'm a transportation planner. I've been in my current position since 2018, so about eight years now.

**Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your background and what led you into this field?**

**Anson Gock:** I studied urban planning at the University of Kansas, with a focus on transportation. After college, I worked for several city and county governments and at NC State University, managing the campus bus system and maintenance programs. Later, I worked for FEMA after Hurricane Sandy, coordinating housing recovery efforts in Long Island. I've also worked in Arizona and done consulting for travel demand modeling, which means forecasting and simulating how transportation systems perform now and in the future. At one point, I managed Federal Transit Administration grants and oversaw the capital transportation prioritization process. That's basically where we assign points to projects to decide which ones get funded. I manage around 20 or 30 projects at a time. I also host a podcast about housing affordability, and I've even discussed housing issues with a few U.S. senators. So, my background has always been a mix of transportation, housing, and planning, all connected.

**Q: That's really interesting. Given your experience, what's your general impression of transportation-related injuries in Delaware?**

**Anson Gock:** Honestly, the United States and Delaware specifically have higher transportation injury and fatality rates than many other developed countries. If you look at countries like England, Canada, or Japan, they have much lower rates. And I don't think it's because their infrastructure is dramatically better; I think it's mostly due to driver discipline. Here in the U.S., driver education and testing are pretty minimal. For example, in Delaware and most states, you don't even need to parallel park anymore to get a license. In Japan, you have to pass a much more complex test. I think that difference in standards plays a huge role in overall safety.

**Q: What kind of measures or strategies do you think could help reduce injuries and fatalities here?**

**Anson Gock:** There are a few things. Roundabouts are one; Delaware has been adding more of them, and they really do help reduce severe crashes because they eliminate head-on and high-speed angle collisions. But I also think we need to teach people *how* to drive through roundabouts properly. That goes back to driver education and discipline again. Another thing

I've noticed is that vehicle performance keeps getting better at braking, handling, and acceleration, but that makes it easier for drivers to go faster and take risks. We're seeing that in crash data, especially since COVID. During the pandemic, there were fewer cars on the road, but traffic accidents, DUI, and reckless driving actually went up. I presented on that topic at a World Transportation Research Congress in Germany. I think it connects to broader mental health challenges people are experiencing.

**Q: Since Delaware is a smaller state, do you think that affects how transportation safety is managed here?**

**Anson Gock:** Definitely. Delaware's small size is actually a big advantage. Our state's DOT maintains about 90% of the roads here. In most states, DOTs only manage maybe 20 or 30 percent, and the rest are split between cities and counties. That makes coordination harder. Here, it's much easier to get agencies on the same page, like DelDOT, Division of Public Health, or other state departments, because it's all under one umbrella.

**Q: Are there certain areas or populations that are more affected by transportation injuries in Delaware?**

**Anson Gock:** Yes, definitely. There are some high-crash corridors, for example, Route 13 has been identified as one of them. The state is doing targeted projects there to improve pedestrian safety and make infrastructure changes. But, like in many states, those corridors often overlap with low-income and immigrant communities. I saw the same pattern when I worked in Atlanta. Funding is always a limitation; you can't fix everything at once, but I do think Delaware is trying to address those areas.

**Q: What would you say are your biggest hopes for the future of transportation safety in Delaware?**

**Anson Gock:** I'd love to see a shift in culture, more emphasis on driver discipline and education, and maybe a stronger licensing process. I also think we can reduce risk by changing how we live and work. Remote work has shown that not every job requires a commute. The more people can work from home or use delivery services, the fewer trips they make, and that directly reduces exposure to crashes. We should also think about bringing services to people, like home health visits for older adults. That reduces the need for vulnerable populations to travel unnecessarily. And, of course, we need better integration of freight, transit, and passenger systems so that all modes of travel can coexist safely.

**Q: That's a good point. You've also mentioned health a few times. Can you expand on how you see health connecting to transportation planning?**

**Anson Gock:** Sure. I think the U.S. spends more money on health care than any other country, but we don't always see that reflected in our outcomes. A lot of that has to do with how funding is structured. We don't invest enough in the social and environmental factors that shape health, transportation being one of them. Transportation safety, air quality, access to parks, and active transportation, all of those influence public health. If we spent more on prevention and safer systems, we'd probably save money in the long run.

**Q: That's very true. Are there other changes you'd like to see that could help improve driver behavior over time?**

**Anson Gock:** Education, definitely. I think traffic safety should be part of the public school curriculum, not just "red light means stop." Kids should understand how road systems work, what right-of-way means, and why speed limits exist. Other countries start teaching those things early, and it creates a more disciplined driving culture. We don't have that here, and I think it shows in our crash statistics.

**Q: That makes a lot of sense. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?**

**Anson Gock:** Just that we can't solve transportation safety with infrastructure alone. It has to be a combination of education, enforcement, and community awareness. We can build safer roads, but if people aren't disciplined behind the wheel, those improvements only go so far. Changing culture and habits is just as important as changing design.