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Florida stretch of I-95 deadliest highway in the nation; I-4 ranks No. 3

By Rick Stone and Luisa Yanez, The Miami Herald (MCT)

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If driving on Interstate 95 makes you fear for your life, there's good reason.

Five years of highway fatality data have found that Florida's 382-mile stretch of the highway is the most dangerous road in the country, with the worst rate of fatal accidents, according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data.

To determine a road's ranking, the Daily Beast website, using the federal agency's figures, broke each interstate into stretches within individual states. It tallied fatal accidents, rather than total fatalities, and then divided that by the number of miles of that state's stretch.



I-95's rate was 1.73 fatal accidents per mile in Florida for the five-year period from 2004 through 2008.

Florida Highway Patrol Lt. Alex Annunziato knows well the perils of I-95's always-busy Miami-Dade/Broward stretch. He largely blames driver distraction for many of the accidents.

Those distractions include cellphones and other technologies, such as video players and satellite navigation systems.

They would be bad enough on ordinary roads, Annunziato said. But on super-congested I-95, the dangers they pose are magnified.

"I think it's the volume coupled with the level of distraction that's present in the driving environment these days," he said. "That really is a recipe for what we've been seeing here."

Often, when he pulls drivers over, he gets a clear view of the level of their distraction even though they are rolling down a major expressway at 60-plus miles an hour.

"They're completely startled. You can absolutely see it when my lights come on. They just have this look of, "Where did this guy come from?" he said.

Annunziato said 12 years ago, when he was a young state trooper, enforcing the law on the local stretch of I-95 was no more difficult than being visible in his back and yellow cruiser. Everybody would slow down and obey the rules.

It's different today, he said.

"I get people passing me all the time. I see a lot of aggressive driving out there, a lot of lane-changing."

Fitting too many drivers onto one expressway, even up to 10 lanes wide in Broward and up to 12 lanes wide in Miami-Dade, is another reason I-95 is so dangerous. The Florida Department of Transportation admits traffic volume is a problem, but a spokeswoman says it's no longer possible to add lanes.

"We don't have the money to buy all those homes and all that right-of-way in order to add lanes to what's already there," she said.

"You may have an I-75 with the same number of lanes, but it doesn't service as many people, so you don't see as many accidents, although I-75 certainly has its own challenges," she said.

What can be done, Kelleher said, has been done already: Installing express lanes in Miami-Dade -- and eventually in Broward -- to separate long-haul drivers from short-range commuters, and using traffic signals at on-ramps so motorists don't all crowd onto the expressway at once.

America's 10 Deadliest Highways: 1. I-95, Florida

2. I-76, New Jersey

3. I-4, Florida

4. I-15, California

5. I-10, California

6. I-59, Louisiana

7. I-94, Illinois

8. I-93, Massachusetts

9. I-95, Delaware

10. I-55, Tennessee

SOURCE: The Daily Beast with data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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