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ARTICLE & GRAPHICS BY RICHARD ELLIS

WHICH IS SAFER FOR CYCLISTS: PARK CITY OR HEBER CITY?

IT MOSTLY DEPENDS ON WHERE YOU BIKE

Riding a bike on Wasatch Back roads can be petrifying. Every year, stories of cyclists injured, maimed, or killed by motor vehicles circulate in Utah news and among bikers.

Because human beings overestimate the likelihood of rare but catastrophic events—a concept known as "dread risk"—we probably believe that car-bike accidents happen more often than they do. As we'll see, the risk to cyclists depends heavily on where we bike. Moreover, there are notable differences between patterns of crashes in Summit versus Wasatch County.

Which area is safer? What can cyclists and drivers do to mitigate the risks? To answer these questions, we'll explore nearly 15 years of data collected by the Utah Highway Safety Office (HSO) from police departments statewide.

The Norm in Utah

Let's begin with a statewide view of bicycle-car accidents so we know if and how Summit and Wasatch vary from the norm. Between 2010 and March 17, 2025, Utah had 9,113 accidents involving a bicycle and motor vehicle. Of these, 99 were fatal, and 8,338 resulted in an injury. Fatal accidents involve higher speeds, but otherwise resemble non-fatal accidents.

About 50% of the drivers were male, 42% were female, and the rest unknown (due to hit-and-run accidents). Younger drivers were more likely to hit bicyclists, but somewhere between ages 35 and 45, a driver's likelihood of hitting a cyclist falls steeply.

All told, 66% of crashes happen at intersections. Typically, the driver is turning right (36% of cases) or driving straight (35%). In about 40% of cases, the driver failed to yield right-of-way.

Men with Big Cars

In Summit County, there have been 96 "bicycle involved" crashes reported to police over the last 15 years, and almost 70% of those involved a male driver. Men between the ages of 45 and 59 account for more than a third of accidents involving a bike. Almost half the time, the driver is in a pickup truck (29%) or SUV (28%).

Yes, Summit County's stereotypically aggressive, middle-age man in a truck does hit cyclists more than average, but that's not surprising considering that 60% of the vehicles registered in Summit County in 2024 were "light trucks."

What about the cyclist? In Summit County, it's usually a male rider (65%) between the ages of 45 and 65 (38%).

Wasatch: Less Safe for Kids

With a total of 61 crashes, Wasatch County seems safer at first glance, but that's not true if you're a kid. In Wasatch, 50% of the cyclists involved in car crashes are under the age of 20. In Summit, only 16% are.

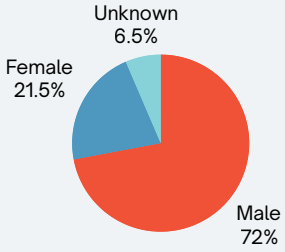
CAR-BICYCLE CRASHES

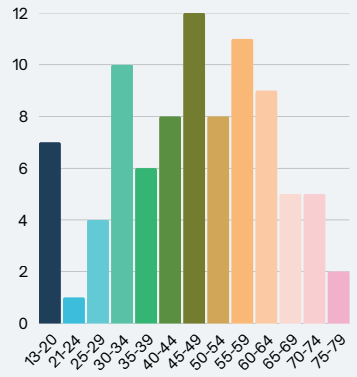
SUMMIT V. WASATCH

What 15 years of police reports tell us about "bicycle involved" motor vehicle accidents in greater Park City and Heber City.

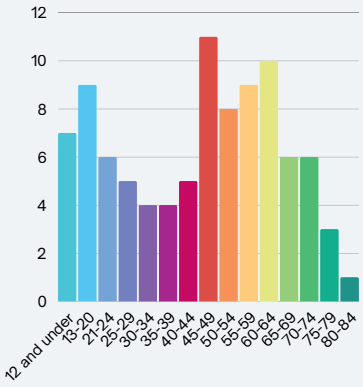
SUMMIT
Total Crashes: 96

72% of the drivers involved in a crash are male, and they skew middle age.



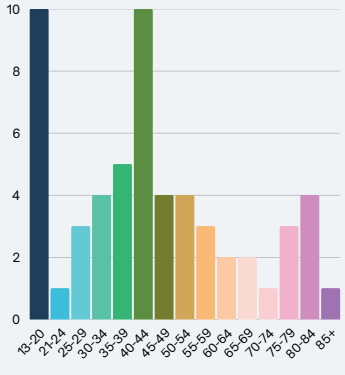


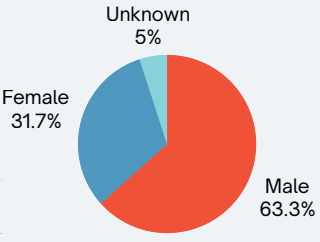
About 17% of crashes involve a bicyclist under the age of 20. 65% of all the cyclists are male.

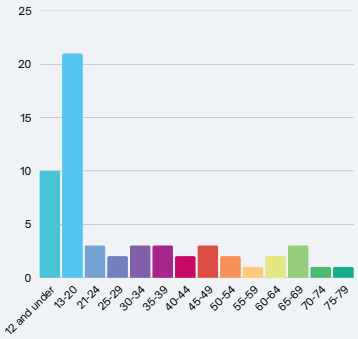


WASATCH
Total Crashes: 61

63% of the drivers involved in a crash are male, and they skew young.







About 50% of crashes involve a bicyclist under the age of 20. 69% of all the cyclists are male.

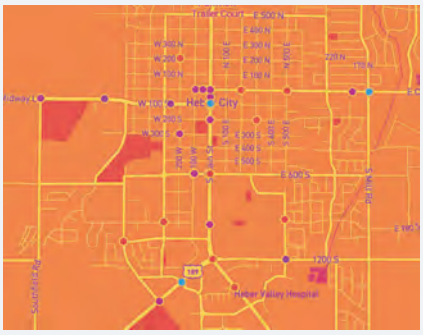
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WHERE DO CRASHES HAPPEN?

Kearns and Bonanza/Monitor is a hot spot with 11 crashes, as are intersections all along Park Ave / SR-224 to Kimball Junction.

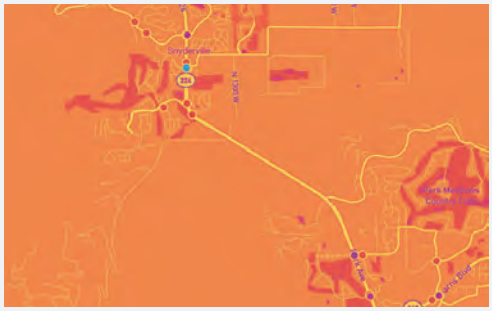


Crashes are clustered at intersections along and around Main St. / US-40

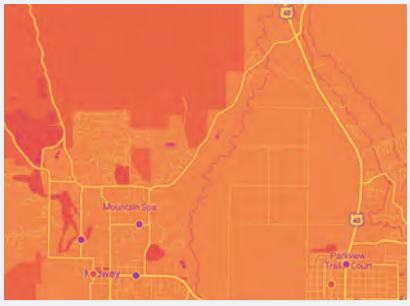


WHERE DON'T CRASHES HAPPEN?

Stretches of road with wide shoulders and no major intersections, like SR-224 between Payday Dr. and Canyons Resort Dr.



River Road in Midway, where there are mainly roundabouts instead of 4-way or T intersections.



*Data and maps sourced from the Utah Highway Safety Office

While Wasatch's population of cyclists probably skews young, that doesn't explain why almost double the number of kids—16 in Summit versus 31 in Wasatch—have been hit. The difference, perhaps, is Park City's system of paved pathways that welcome pedestrians and bikes. Heber has nothing comparable near downtown.

Young drivers are more likely to hit cyclists in Wasatch. Whereas teens in Summit are responsible for just 6% of crashes, Wasatch teens account 16% and tie with 40-44-year-olds. As in Summit, male drivers (and bicyclists) are overrepresented in accidents in Wasatch, accounting for 62%, and again, light trucks account for half.

To be clear, Utah men aren't special. Nationwide, men are statistically more dangerous in the car than women, both to themselves and others. Blame testosterone.

Altogether, the data from Summit and Wasatch is unambiguous. Summit County is safer for youth cyclists. Wasatch probably has less accidents total because there are fewer cyclists on Heber roads.

Some of the most popular segments in the area, like Old Ranch Road in Park City and Brown's Canyon Road have long stretches without any busy intersections. Maybe cyclists intuitively know these are safer areas to ride.

Arguably, the safest route around is River Road in Midway with its numerous roundabouts. Between the intersection of US-40/SR-32 and Main Street in Midway, there has not been a single cycling accident reported to police in 15 years. If I ever get back into the Lycra game, that's where you'll find me.

