

The most dangerous intersections in the Town of Paradise Valley

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The intersection of Lincoln Drive and Tatum Boulevard has more traffic collisions than any other part of town. (File photo)

There are only two roads that span the width of Paradise Valley — Tatum Boulevard and Lincoln Drive — and it's at that intersection numbers show to be the municipality's highest collision frequency point.

The intersection of Tatum and Lincoln has yielded 66 traffic collisions in the past three years, a recent records request shows.

The two roadways are the town's main thoroughfares to get through the entirety of the town, while the other roadways are minor arterials and collector streets in mostly residential areas. Tatum Boulevard and Lincoln Drive are also the only two local roadways with a speed limit of 40 MPH.

The Town of Paradise Valley Independent newspaper filed a public records request seeking information on the intersections within the municipality that saw the most traffic collisions since 2016. The results are:

2016:

- Lincoln Drive and Tatum Boulevard: 40
- Lincoln Drive and Mockingbird Lane: 10
- Tatum Boulevard and Desert Jewel Drive: 9
- Lincoln Drive and 56th Street: 7
- Lincoln Drive and Desert Fairways Drive: 6

2017:

- Lincoln Drive and Tatum Boulevard: 24
- Lincoln Drive and Mockingbird Lane: 7
- Tatum Boulevard and McDonald Drive: 7
- Desert Fairways Drive and Lincoln Drive: 7
- Tatum Boulevard and Foothill Drive: 6

2018:

- Tatum Boulevard and Lincoln Drive: 21
- Mockingbird Lane and Lincoln Drive: 9
- Tatum Boulevard and Foothill Drive: 6
- Palo Cristi Drive and Lincoln Drive: 5
- Invergordon Road and Doubletree Ranch Road: 4

When looking at the decrease of accidents on Tatum and Lincoln from 2016 to 2017 and 2018, Paradise Valley Police Department Lt. Michael Cole points to the department's recent traffic program as a deterrent.

The Data Drive Approach to Crime and Traffic program — known amongst police officials as DDACTS — began in 2017, and is centered around the Lincoln and Tatum area.



Paradise Valley Police Lt. Mike Cole

“DDACTS attempts to identify areas where higher volumes of traffic accidents and crimes overlap and directs additional high visibility enforcement efforts to those locations,” said Lt. Cole.

“The DDACTS program has resulted in officers spending quite a bit more time in the area of this intersection conducting high visibility traffic enforcement and likely has a big role in the accident reduction reported in this area.”

In 2017, the Independent reported the DDACTS program was anchored through the gathering and analysis of four years of data, where the police department was able to

identify hundreds of theft or traffic accidents in this specific 2.5-square-mile zone, around Tatum Boulevard and Lincoln Drive.

As a result, the police department deployed its officers to generally be more present, and use traffic enforcement to play a dual role in fighting crime.

Lt. Cole points to the length and speed limit of Tatum and Lincoln as two potential reasons that area has such a high frequency of collisions.

“Higher traffic volumes and higher speeds generally correlate to higher accident counts,” he said. “Almost every other street in town is one lane in each direction, but Tatum and Lincoln both have two lanes in each direction.”

In 2014, the town conducted traffic counts at all major intersections, Lt. Cole explained. The results of the study showed Tatum and Lincoln had a total of 24,530 cars pass through, with a peak of 5,072 cars.

“The second busiest intersection during that study was Tatum and Quartz Mountain with 14,793 total cars and a peak of 3,130,” Lt. Cole said.

“Lincoln and Tatum had over 65 percent more total traffic than the second busiest intersection, and more than 62 percent more traffic during the peak than the second busiest intersection.”

Maintaining a safe environment

The most common type of accidents reported are rear-end collisions, Lt. Cole said. In 2017, rear-end collisions accounted for 49 percent of all accidents in town.

“The most common causes for rear-end collisions are distracted driving and speeding. Our photo enforcement technicians have been keeping track of drivers who can be seen on their violation picture looking at their phone or distracted in some other way where their attention is not on the roadway and found that a significant percentage of all violations involve distracted driving,” he said.

For the local police department and public officials alike, roadway safety for Paradise Valley is a top priority.

“Protecting lives and property is the primary mission of the Paradise Valley Police Department and is a part of our mission statement,” Lt. Cole said, pointing out the town’s history with photo enforcement, which began in 1987.

Town Councilwoman Anna Thomasson says after photo enforcement was implemented, speed and run light running collisions dropped by 40 percent.

“Photo enforcement works,” she said.

Vice Mayor Scott Moore says public safety is one of the platforms he ran on in his 2016 Town Council campaign.



Vice Mayor Scott Moore (Independent Newsmedia/Arianna Grainey)

“With that being said, balancing safety with traffic engineering standards is a major concern,” he said. “One example would be while lowering the design speed of a roadway that is designed to move traffic at higher speeds is generally not statistically safer, when other factors are considered such as the presence of many pedestrians or other conflicting movements such as residential homes, driveways and places of concentrated businesses conflict with these design speeds then a lower speed limit should be considered.”

When looking at the records request data, Mr. Moore points out that many other locations with high-collision rates depict a major arterial crossing with a minor arterial or collector street.

Arterials and collectors are two of the many different street classifications given by traffic engineers when designing streets to move traffic flow, Mr. Moore explained, whereas a major arterial has design features that allows for higher traffic counts and speeds.

“Simply put, Tatum and Lincoln carry more traffic and at a higher rate of speed than any other intersection in town, so therefore it would be understandable it may have a higher number of collisions based on those two factors alone,” he said.

“One of the factors traffic engineers use when measuring accident rates is they would look at traffic volumes vs accidents when measuring accident rates. With this being said the percentages of collisions vs traffic counts may be similar in all the locations provided in the data if excessive speed is not a factor.”

The obvious bad habit identified on roadways today is distracted driving from today’s intense use of cell phones, Mr. Moore said, describing it as a national issue.

“Although many states have enacted distracted driving laws, our Arizona legislators are hearing Senate Bill 1165 sponsored by Senator Kate Brophy McGee as we speak. It has

active support from many diverse stakeholders including the League of Cities and Towns,” he said. “This bill would make the use of a cell phone while driving a primary offense, meaning a police officer could pull a driver over for that violation alone. This would provide a statewide framework to reduce distracted driving and improve traffic safety.”



Councilwoman Anna Thomasson (Independent Newsmedia/Arianna Graine)

Ms. Thomasson, a longtime Paradise Valley resident who was elected to Town Council this past fall, also pointed to distracted driving as a potential danger on local streets.

“Distracted driving, including texting, killed almost 3,200 people nationally in 2017. When I think of the pain those families and friends endured, my heart breaks,” she said.

Ms. Thomasson says while campaigning over the past year, she has learned about the town’s efforts to keep residents safe.

“Safety is everything,” she said. “As I’ve learned more about the Town over the last year, I’ve come to appreciate the work of Police Chief Wingert and his team in keeping us safe, through more active enforcement of traffic violations and suspicious activity. Feeling safe in our homes and on our streets so we can relax and enjoy the beauty of our community is what helps keep Paradise Valley, Paradise Valley.”

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