

DISTRACTED DRIVING IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, 2014-2016

September 2018



DISTRACTED DRIVING IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, 2014-2016

Franklin Regional Council of Governments

12 Olive Street, Suite 2
Greenfield, MA 01301
413-774-3167
www.frcog.org

Transportation Planning Staff

Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Program Manager

Ryan Clary, Senior GIS Specialist

Elizabeth Giannini, Senior Transportation Planner II

Alyssa Larose, Senior Land Use and Natural Resources Planner

Maureen Mullaney, Transportation & GIS Program Manager II

Megan Rhodes, Senior Transportation and Land Use Planner

Laurie Scarbrough, Transportation Planning Engineer

Margaret Sloan, Director of Planning & Development

September 2018



DISTRACTED DRIVING IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, 2014-2016

This report was prepared under MassDOT contract 95427 in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration.

Notice of Nondiscrimination Rights and Protections to Beneficiaries

Federal "Title VI/Nondiscrimination" Protections

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) operates its programs, services, and activities in compliance with federal nondiscrimination laws including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, and related statutes and regulations. Title VI prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and requires that no person in the United States of America shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency), be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal assistance. Related federal nondiscrimination laws administered by the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, or both prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, sex, and disability. These protected categories are contemplated within FRCOG's Title VI Programs consistent with federal interpretation and administration. Additionally, the FRCOG provides meaningful access to its programs, services, and activities to individuals with limited English proficiency, in compliance with U.S. Department of Transportation policy and guidance on federal Executive Order 13166.

State Nondiscrimination Protections

FRCOG also complies with the Massachusetts Public Accommodation Law, M.G.L c 272 §§ 92a, 98, 98a, prohibiting making any distinction, discrimination, or restriction in admission to or treatment in a place of public accommodation based on race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or ancestry. Likewise, the FRCOG complies with the Governor's Executive Order 526, section 4 requiring all programs, activities, and services provided, performed, licensed, chartered, funded, regulated, or contracted for by the state shall be conducted without unlawful discrimination based on race, color, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, creed, ancestry, national origin, disability, veteran's status (including Vietnam-era veterans), or background.

Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization meetings are conducted in accessible locations, and materials can be provided in accessible formats and in languages other than English. If you would like accessibility or language accommodation, please contact the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization at 413-774-3167 (voice) (MA Relay System:800-439-2370), 413-774-3169 (fax), or mrhodes@frcog.org (e-mail). The Franklin Regional Council of Governments has posted information for the public regarding the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization's Title VI obligations and protections against discrimination afforded to the public by Title VI on the website.

If you believe that you or anyone in a specific class of persons has been subjected to discrimination prohibited by Title VI and other nondiscrimination laws based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, or gender, you or your representative may file a complaint with the FRCOG, which we can help complete. A complaint must be filed no later than 180 days after the date of the alleged discrimination.

English: If this information is needed in another language, please contact the FRCOG Title VI Specialist at (413) 774-3167.

Spanish: Si necesita esta información en otro idioma, por favor contacte al especialista de FRCOG del Título VI al (413)774-3167.

Russian: Если Вам необходима данная информация на любом другом языке, пожалуйста, свяжитесь со специалистом по Титулу VI FRCOG по тел: (413) 774-3167.

DISTRACTED DRIVING IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, 2014-2016

Table of Contents

- INTRODUCTION..... 1**
- DATA SOURCES 2**
- DATA ANALYSIS 2**
 - DRIVER DISTRACTIONS 2
 - CRASH SEVERITY 4
 - TYPE OF COLLISION..... 5
 - CRASH LOCATION..... 7
 - CRASH PATTERNS..... 10
 - DRIVER DEMOGRAPHICS..... 15
 - NON-MOTORISTS 18
- CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... 19**
- APPENDIX. MASSDOT RMV CRASH RECORDS, FRANKLIN
COUNTY, 2014-2016..... 21**

Introduction

Each day in the United States, approximately 9 people are killed and more than 1,000 are injured in crashes that are reported to involve a distracted driver¹. Distracted driving is doing another activity that takes your attention away while driving. At 55 mph, taking your eyes off the road for 5 seconds equates to travelling the length of a football field with your eyes closed.

In recent years, texting and mobile devices have grabbed attention as being the most dangerous driver distraction, but these aren't the only things that can distract drivers. Distractions are anything that diverts attention from driving, including talking or texting, tuning a stereo, talking to passengers in your vehicle, eating, personal grooming, looking too long at roadside scenery – anything that takes your focus away from safe driving.

Massachusetts enacted the Mass Safe Driving Law in September 2010. This law bans sending, typing or reading electronic messages to or from handheld devices while operating a motor vehicle. This includes use of the internet and text messaging. The law also bans all handheld use of electronics by junior operators while behind the wheel. However, research by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) shows that, nationally, bans on cellphone use have reduced cellphone use but not distracted driving crashes². Clearly, a different approach is needed.

In recent years, a movement has grown that aims to achieve a highway system with no fatalities or serious road traffic injuries; this movement is known as Vision Zero. Vision Zero urges communities and policy makers to embrace new methodologies to eliminate roadway injuries and death. Distracted driving is a particular focus area of Vision Zero, as it is a problem that may be solved by technology, including the driver assist features of new cars on the road today, and the driverless, autonomous vehicles of the future.

This report will identify unique features of distracted driving crashes in Franklin County in comparison to all crashes occurring in Franklin County during the study period. This is a first step towards reducing, and perhaps someday eliminating, roadway injuries in Franklin County.

¹ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. [Distracted Driving: 2015](#), in *Traffic Safety Research Notes*. DOT HS 812 381. March 2017, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: Washington, D.C.

² www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/distracted-driving/hldi-research

Data Sources

To conduct this analysis, the FRCOG obtained crash data from MassDOT for the three most recent years available, 2014 to 2016. Using three years of data typically allows minor anomalies in the data to be normalized. The source of the MassDOT data comes from crash reports submitted to the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV). A table of all crash records analyzed in this report is provided in the Appendix.

Massachusetts law requires that a crash report be filed with the RMV within five days of the occurrence of a motor vehicle crash in which someone has been killed, someone has been injured, or at least \$1,000 of property damage has resulted³. For crashes occurring in Franklin County, crash reporting is the responsibility of local or state police, or by the driver of a crash after the fact when police are not called.

Beginning in 2013, police crash reports include an indication of whether a driver was distracted, and by what they were distracted. This report looks at all crashes in which such distractions were reported. The determination of what constituted a distraction was made by either the police at the scene of a crash, or by a driver self-reporting the crash after the fact.

Data Analysis

Driver Distractions

Between 2014 and 2016 there were 3,347 recorded crashes in the 26 communities of Franklin County. Of these crashes, 349 involved at least one distracted driver, representing 10% of all crashes in Franklin County (Table 1).

³ Massachusetts General Laws – Chapter 90, Section 26

Table 1. Distracted Driving Crashes in Franklin County, 2014-2016

Franklin County Crashes Reported	2014	2015	2016	Total	Percent of All Crashes
Distraction cited	96	107	146	349	10%
No distraction cited	1137	1130	1031	3,298	90%
Total all crashes	1233	1237	1177	3,647	100%

There are seven types of driver distraction to select from when a crash report is created:

1. External distraction (outside of vehicle)
2. Manually operating an electronic device
3. Passenger
4. Talking on hand-held electronic device
5. Talking on hands-free electronic device
6. Other activity (electronic device)
7. Other activity (searching, eating, personal hygiene, etc.)

We might expect that the use of mobile devices was the most common type of driver distraction, but this was not the case. The most common distraction reported was “other activity (searching, eating, personal hygiene, etc.)”, reported in 44% of all crashes involving a distracted driver. Use of electronic devices constituted 27% of the reported distractions. All types of distractions reported are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of Distraction Reported in Franklin County, 2014-2016

Driver Distracted By	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
Other activity (searching, eating, personal hygiene)	155	44%
External distraction (outside of vehicle)	77	22%
Manually operating an electronic device	60	17%
Passenger	23	7%
Talking on hand-held device	15	4%
Other activity (electronic device)	13	4%
Talking on hands-free device	6	2%
Total	349	100%

Crash Severity

Crash severity is an indication of the seriousness of a given crash. Crash severity is reported as either:

- *Fatal Crash* – The crash resulted in one or more human fatalities;
- *Injury Crash* (Non-Fatal Injury) – The crash resulted in non-fatal injuries to one or more persons; or
- *Non-Injury Crash* (Property Damage Only) – The crash did not result in any apparent injuries but there was property damage totaling at least \$1,000.

Crash severity refers to the most severe outcome resulting from each crash. For example, if a crash leads to both non-fatal injuries and property damage, the severity is reported as a non-fatal injury crash only.

The analysis shows that the severity of crashes involving distracted driving is higher than the severity of crashes in which no distraction was reported. During the study period, a significantly higher percentage of distracted driving crashes resulted in non-fatal injuries. Table 3 shows that 33% of distracted driving crashes resulted in non-fatal injuries, compared to 24% of all crashes.

The reason for this higher rate of injury must be explored further. One distracted driving crash resulted in a fatal injury, a single-vehicle crash in which the driver hit a tree outside the roadway.

Table 3. Crash Severity, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Severity of Crashes	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
Property damage only	224	64%	2,580	71%
Non-fatal injury	115	33%	882	24%
Fatal injury	1	0.3%	20	1%
Not reported / unknown	9	3%	165	5%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

Type of Collision

The manner or type of collision describes the way in which a crash occurred. If two or more cars are involved, they can collide at an angle, head-on, rear-end, rear-to-rear (when backing up), or sideswipe. Overall, the most common type of collision in Franklin County is a single-vehicle crash; these constitute almost half of all crashes in the region. However, in distracted driving crashes, rear-end crashes are almost as frequent as single-vehicle crashes (Table 4).

Table 4. Types of Collisions, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Manner of Collision	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
Single-vehicle crash	136	39%	1,767	48%
Rear-end	126	36%	747	20%
Angle	52	15%	651	18%
Sideswipe, same direction	12	3%	172	5%
Sideswipe, opposite direction	9	3%	117	3%
Head-on	7	2%	100	3%
Not reported / Unknown	4	1%	70	2%
Rear-to-rear	3	1%	23	1%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

Distracted driving crashes are more likely to result in injury than other kinds of crashes. This may be because distracted drivers are unable to notice when a collision is imminent and so fail to slow down or maneuver away from a collision in time mitigate the force of the impact of a crash.

For a closer look at the rate of injuries resulting from distracted driving crashes, the type of collision was examined by crash severity. Table 5 shows that in head-on, opposite direction sideswipe, rear-end and single vehicle collisions, distracted driving results in more non-fatal injuries than in other crashes.

Table 5. Non-fatal Injury Crashes by Type of Collision, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Type of Collision	Non-Fatal Injury Crashes, Percent of all Crash Severity Types	
	Distracted Driving	All Crashes
Head-on	71%	51%
Not reported / Unknown	50%	24%
Sideswipe, opposite direction	44%	21%
Rear-end	38%	27%
Single-vehicle crash	32%	24%
Angle	23%	23%
Sideswipe, same direction	8%	9%
Rear-to-rear	0%	4%
Total	33%	24%

Crash Location

The distracted driving crashes reported during the study period are presented on a map in Figure 1. Fifteen of the 349 distracted driving crashes could not be mapped due to a lack of location information in the crash records. The number of distracted driving crashes compared to all crashes reported in each Franklin County town is shown in Table 6. In general, the rate of distracted driving crashes is similar to crashes overall in each town. The towns of Deerfield, Northfield, and Orange did experience a higher percentage of distracted driving crashes compared to all crashes. This may be due to differences in local police reporting of distractions or to other factors.

Table 6. Crashes by Town, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Town	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of DD Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of All Crashes
Greenfield	112	32.1%	1,243	34.1%
Deerfield	53	15.2%	440	12.1%
Montague	39	11.2%	438	12.0%
Orange	37	10.6%	346	9.5%
Northfield	31	8.9%	120	3.3%
Sunderland	17	4.9%	132	3.6%
Whately	17	4.9%	176	4.8%
Erving	9	2.6%	127	3.5%
Shelburne	8	2.3%	86	2.4%
Bernardston	7	2.0%	123	3.4%
Leverett	4	1.2%	63	1.7%
Colrain	3	0.8%	43	1.2%
New Salem	3	0.8%	65	1.8%
Ashfield	2	0.5%	43	1.2%
Charlemont	2	0.5%	51	1.4%
Buckland	1	0.3%	13	0.3%
Gill	1	0.3%	33	0.9%
Hawley	1	0.3%	8	0.2%
Shutesbury	1	0.3%	24	0.6%
Warwick	1	0.3%	10	0.3%
Conway	0	0%	30	0.8%
Heath	0	0%	17	0.5%
Leyden	0	0%	4	0.1%
Monroe	0	0%	0	0%
Rowe	0	0%	1	0%
Wendell	0	0%	11	0.3%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

Table 7 shows the number and percentage of crashes that occurred on major roadways in Franklin County. Interstate 91 carries the largest volume of traffic in Franklin County (over 30,000 vehicles per day), followed by Route 2 (up to 18,000 vehicles per day). It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that the highest number of crashes in Franklin County will occur on Interstate 91, with the next highest number occurring on Route 2. Of all crashes in Franklin County within the study period, 12% occurred on Interstate 91 and 6% occurred on Route 2. However, the number of distracted driving crashes is higher on Route 2 than on Interstate 91. Only 7% of distracted driving crashes occurred on Interstate 91, while 8% of distracted driving crashes occurred on Route 2.

Table 7. Crashes by Major Roadway, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Crashes by Major Roadway	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
Route 2	28	8%	206	6%
Interstate 91 (incl. interchanges)	26	7%	433	12%
Route 10 (not Rte. 5/10)	21	6%	89	2%
Route 116 (not Rte. 5/10)	19	5%	134	4%
Route 5 (incl. Rte. 5/10)	10	3%	85	2%
Route 63	4	1%	36	1%
Route 202	2	1%	78	2%
Other roadway	239	68%	2,586	71%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

The crash analysis also examined whether or not crashes occurred at an intersection and, if so, the types of intersections where crashes occurred. This information is shown in Table 8. The majority of all crashes, 64%, did not occur at intersections but elsewhere along the roadway. This correlates with the fact that the majority of crashes were single-vehicle crashes, which usually do not involve interaction with other vehicles and so can occur anywhere along a roadway, not just at an intersection.

This held true for distracted driving crashes as well, although a smaller percentage of these crashes (60% versus 64%), did not occur at intersections either. A higher percentage of distracted driving crashes occurred at intersections, particularly T-intersections and four-way intersections. This is also evidenced by the fact that distracted driving was a factor in a high percentage of rear-end crashes that typically occur at or near intersections. Distracted drivers are less likely to perceive another vehicle at an intersection in time to avoid a crash.

Table 8. Crashes by Intersection Type, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Roadway Intersection Type	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
Not at intersection	209	60%	2,333	64%
T-intersection	56	16%	491	13%
Four-way intersection	47	13%	398	11%
Off-ramp	12	3%	84	2%
Driveway	9	3%	110	3%
Y-intersection	8	2%	99	3%
Rotary or roundabout	6*	2%	54	1%
On-ramp	1	0.3%	30	1%
Railway grade crossing	1	0.3%	4	0.1%
Not reported	0	0%	44	1%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

*All distracted driving crashes reported at a rotary or roundabout occurred at I-91/Route 2 Rotary in Greenfield.

Crash Patterns

Looking at the months, days, and hours when crashes occur can reveal patterns of driving when crashes are more likely to occur. In general, crashes are more frequent in Franklin County during winter months (December, January, and February) when there is less daylight and roadways may be slippery (Figure 2, Table 9).

Distracted driving crashes do not appear to follow this pattern. The highest percentage of distracted driving crashes occurred in September, traditionally the back-to-school period. Drivers may be adjusting to new routines, new schedules and new travel routes, and not devoting enough attention to driving.

Figure 2. Crashes by Month, Franklin County, 2014-2016

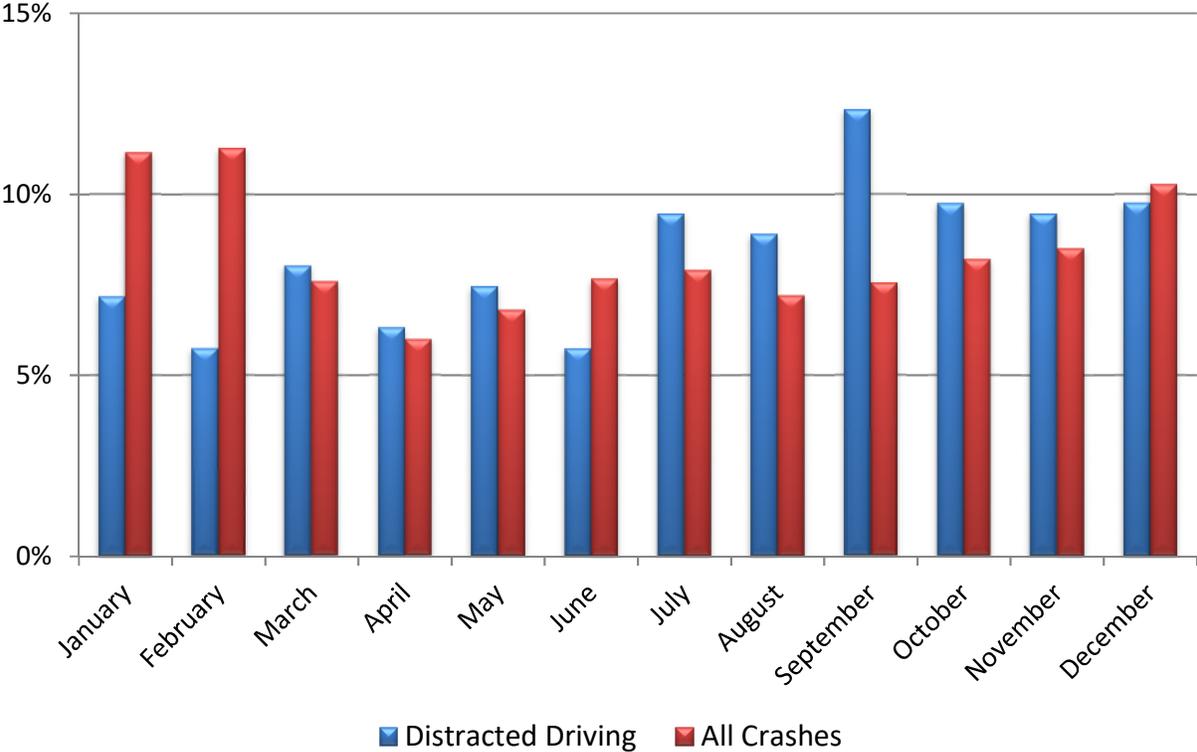


Table 9. Crashes by Month, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Month of Year	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
January	25	7%	406	11%
February	20	6%	411	11%
March	28	8%	277	8%
April	22	6%	218	6%
May	26	8%	248	7%
June	20	6%	279	8%
July	33	9%	288	8%
August	31	9%	262	7%
September	43	12%	275	8%
October	34	10%	299	8%
November	33	9%	310	8%
December	34	10%	374	10%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

Figure 3 and Table 10 show that the rate of crashes, distracted or otherwise, is highest at the end of the week and lower in the beginning of the week, with the lowest percentage occurring on Sunday. Sunday is also typically the day with the lowest traffic volumes. There is a slight increase in the rate of distracted driving crashes on Thursdays; the reason for this was not immediately clear.

Figure 3. Crashes by Day of Week, Franklin County, 2014-2016

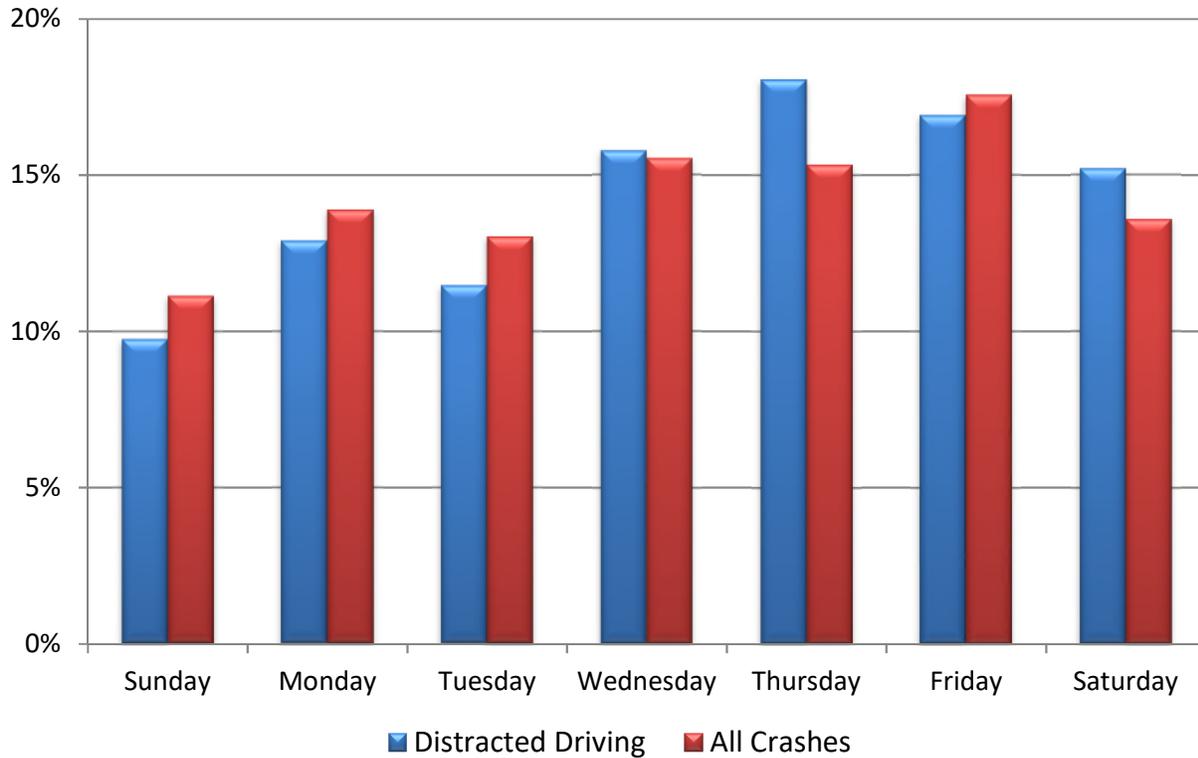


Table 10. Crashes by Day of Week, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Day of Week	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
Sunday	34	10%	406	11%
Monday	45	13%	506	14%
Tuesday	40	11%	475	13%
Wednesday	55	16%	566	16%
Thursday	63	18%	559	15%
Friday	59	17%	640	18%
Saturday	53	15%	495	14%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

The time of day has a noticeable effect on crash rates and distracted driving crashes follow a similar pattern to all other crashes. The highest number of crashes occurs between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., with a slightly lower number occurring between noon and 3:00 p.m. This pattern is even more pronounced with distracted driving crashes; 28% of distracted driving crashes occur between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. and 26% occur between noon and 3:00 p.m. (Table 11).

Figure 4. Crashes by Time of Day, Franklin County, 2014-2016

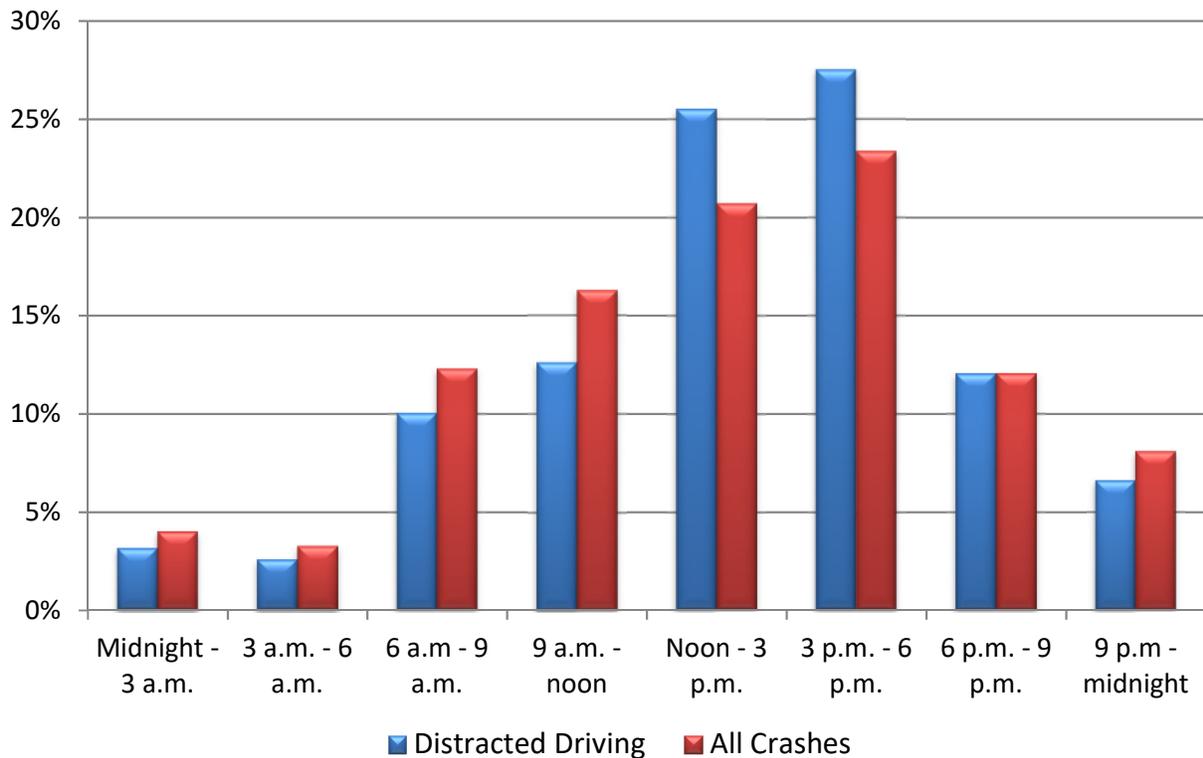


Table 11. Crashes by Time of Day, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Time of Day	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
12 a.m. - 3 a.m.	11	3%	146	4%
3 a.m. - 6 a.m.	9	3%	119	3%
6 a.m. - 9 a.m.	35	10%	448	12%
9 a.m. - 12 p.m.	44	13%	593	16%
12 p.m. - 3 p.m.	89	25%	755	21%
3 p.m. - 6 p.m.	96	28%	852	24%
6 p.m. - 9 p.m.	42	12%	439	12%
9 p.m. - 12 a.m.	23	7%	294	8%
Total	349	100%	3,646*	100%

*One crash reported with unknown time of day.

Driver Demographics

There is not much demographic information available in the RMV crash records to tell us about the types of people who are involved in distracted driving crashes. The only demographic data included in the records is an age range for the youngest and oldest drivers involved in each crash. If a crash involves two or more drivers, the age of the youngest driver and of the oldest driver is reported within a four-year age range for drivers from 16 to 20 years old or from 21 to 24 years old, or within a ten-year age range for drivers 25 or older (see Figures 5 and 6 and in Tables 12 and 13). If a crash involves only one driver (single-vehicle crash), the age range of the single driver is reported as both youngest and oldest driver. In the case of a crash involving more than one driver, the RMV crash records do not clearly indicate which driver was at fault in each crash.

Overall, the ages of drivers involved in distracted driving crashes are distributed in a similar pattern to the ages of drivers involved in all crashes. The age group involved in the highest percentage of crashes (23%) as well as the highest percentage of distracted driving crashes (22%) is “youngest drivers” aged 21-24 years old. Youngest drivers of ages 21-24 were involved in 4% more distracted driving crashes than in other crashes. Youngest drivers aged 35-44 accounted for 3% more distracted driving crashes than the same age group reported in all crashes. Youngest drivers aged 45-54 accounted for 4% fewer distracted driving crashes than the same age group reported in all crashes (Figure 5, Table 12).

Figure 5. Crashes by Age of Youngest Driver, Franklin County, 2014-2016

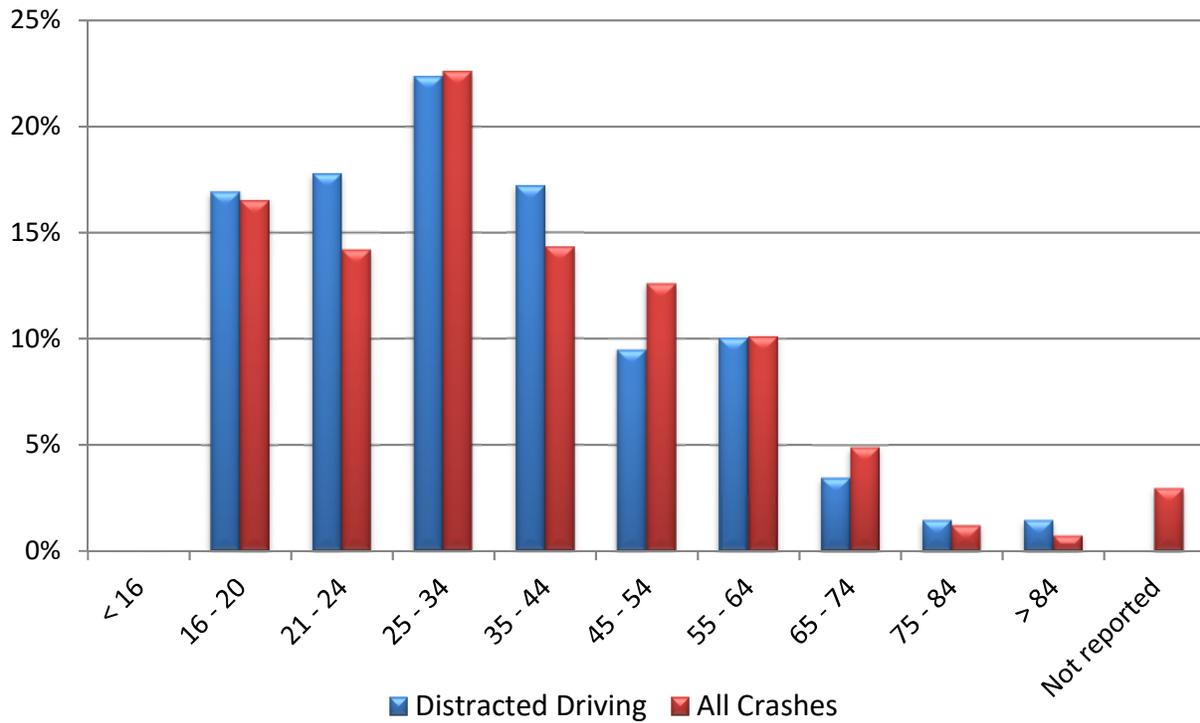


Table 12. Crashes by Age of Youngest Driver, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Age of Youngest Driver	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
< 16	0	0%	1	0.03%
16 - 20	59	17%	602	17%
21 - 24	62	18%	517	14%
25 - 34	78	22%	824	23%
35 - 44	60	17%	522	14%
45 - 54	33	9%	459	13%
55 - 64	35	10%	368	10%
65 - 74	12	3%	178	5%
75 - 84	5	1%	43	1%
> 84	5	1%	26	1%
Not reported	0	0%	107	3%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

Figure 6. Crashes by Age of Oldest Driver, Franklin County, 2014-2016

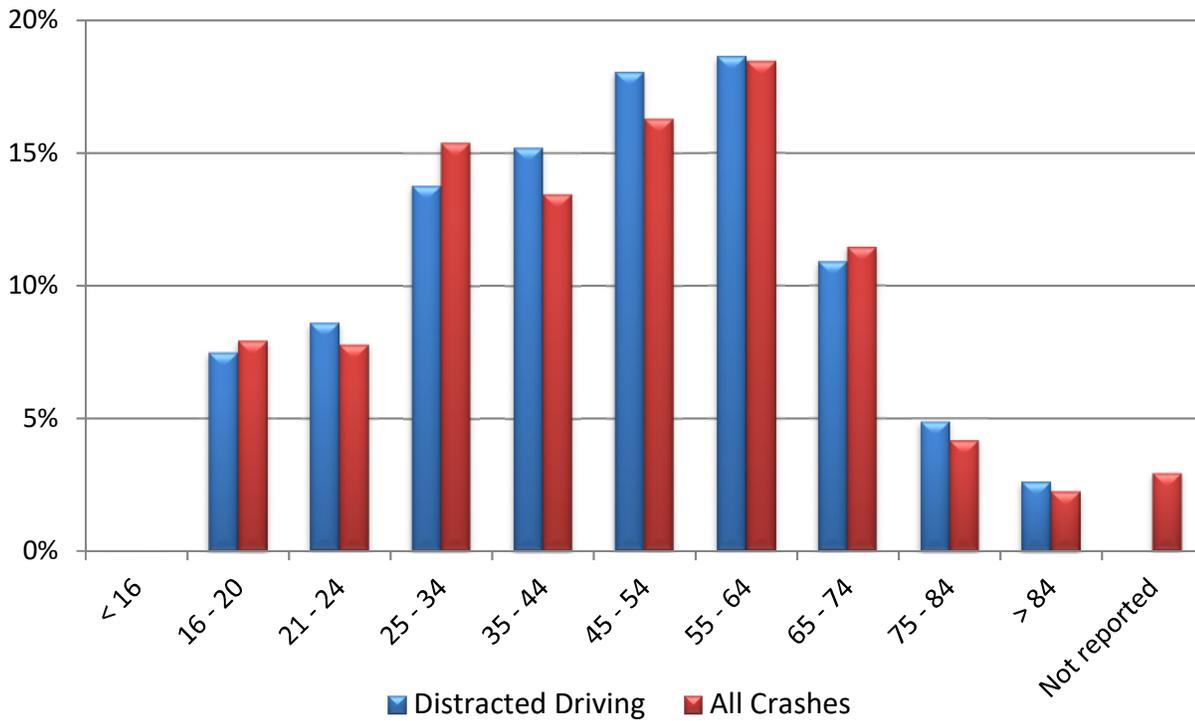


Table 13. Crashes by Age of Oldest Driver, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Age of Oldest Driver	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
< 16	0	0%	1	0.03%
16 - 20	26	7%	288	8%
21 - 24	30	9%	283	8%
25 - 34	48	14%	561	15%
35 - 44	53	15%	490	13%
45 - 54	63	18%	594	16%
55 - 64	65	19%	673	18%
65 - 74	38	11%	417	11%
75 - 84	17	5%	152	4%
> 84	9	3%	81	2%
Not reported	0	0%	107	3%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

Oldest drivers aged 55-64 are involved in the highest percentage (18%) of all crashes, as well as the highest percentage (19%) of distracted driving crashes. Oldest drivers of ages 35-44 and ages 45-54 accounted for 2% more distracted driving crashes than the same age group reported in all crashes.

Non-motorists

Lastly, Table 14 presents crashes involving non-motorists, including cyclists, pedestrians, and wheelchair users. No particular trend or discrepancy was found in comparing distracted driving crashes to all crashes involving non-motorists. Overall, 98% of all crashes in Franklin County during the study period did not involve non-motorists. Similarly, 98% of distracted driving crashes did not involve non-motorists.

Table 14. Crashes Involving Non-motorists, Franklin County, 2014-2016

Non-motorist Type	Distracted Driving		All Crashes	
	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes	Number of Crashes	Percent of Crashes
Cyclists	2	0.6%	41	1.1%
Pedestrians	4	1.1%	30	0.8%
Others (wheelchair users, etc.)	0	0%	14	0.4%
None	343	98%	3,562	98%
Total	349	100%	3,647	100%

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report finds that distracted driving was involved in 10% of all motor vehicle crashes that occurred within Franklin County between 2014 and 2016. The most common distractions reported were activities not related to external conditions or use of mobile devices, but rather other activities such as searching, eating, and personal hygiene activities.

Distracted driving crashes are more likely to result in non-fatal injuries than other crashes with no distractions reported. The rate of collisions involving more than one vehicle, particularly rear-end collisions, was higher when distracted driving was a factor. Distracted driving crashes occur at a higher rate during September than do other crashes.

Noting that distracted driving is more likely to result in injury and more likely to involve more than one vehicle, distracted driving presents a risk to all motorists and their passengers, not just the individual distracted driver. In other words, it is a risk to public health. Regardless of the ubiquity of personal mobile devices and the law preventing their use while driving, all travelers are at risk from distracted driving.

Some measures can be taken to reduce and potentially eliminate the risks of distracted driving. Public messaging can be targeted prior to and during the month of September, particularly to parents of school children and to high school and college students. These messages should highlight that while mobile device use is a significant source of distraction, other non-driving activities, such as searching, eating, and personal grooming, are just as distracting.

The benefits of driver-assisting technologies that are now available, such as lane assistance, adaptive cruise control, and collision avoidance systems, should be promoted to people looking to purchase new cars. The adoption of autonomous vehicles in the future is expected to virtually eliminate the risk of distracted driving. Local communities and MassDOT should begin preparing to adapt our existing roadways to best accommodate self-driving vehicles. This would include maintaining clear pavement markings and signage that can be perceived by autonomous vehicle systems on all roadways.

Staff of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments will continue to monitor the risks of distracted driving in this region. Future reports on regional crash data and traffic safety, such as the report of most hazardous intersections in Franklin County that is compiled every three years, will include analyses of distracted driving crashes.

Appendix.

Massachusetts Department of Transportation Registry of Motor Vehicles

Motor Vehicle Crash Records, Franklin County, 2014-2016