



Alfonso A. Casillo

You have been covering transportation for Newsday since 2016. Start weeks 19 being his insights about Long Island's dangerous roads, along with in-depth news, reporting and analysis from his award-winning reporter. Reach out with tips, questions or suggestions at paolo@newsday.com



Be thankful if you can avoid Thanksgiving traffic. Credit: Daniela Pridemore

A quick reminder that I'll be moderating a town hall discussion about potential solutions for Long Island's dangerous roads on Dec. 17 at Newsday's MediaLab studios. In addition to our panel of experts on stage with me, I'm interested in hearing your ideas for making our roads safer. Get your free tickets at newsday.com/town

Among my very favorite family traditions each year is peeling potatoes on the living room floor on Thanksgiving eve as we watch John Hughes' holiday classic, *"Home Alone and Home Alone 2: Lost in New York"*. The film includes some important lessons on driver safety, not the least of which is the importance of taking off your coat before beginning your journey. Car cabins can get awfully warm, especially if you lose a lit cigarette in the back seat.

Ahead of my favorite holiday, I want to take the opportunity to share some road-related gratitude.

- I'm thankful that nobody in my immediate family has to drive very far to be together. AAA estimates that **81.8 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more this week**, making it the single busiest holiday for travel. With a significant increase in cars on the roads comes a significant increase in crashes. The National Safety Council estimates that **432 people die, 56 in the U.S.** in a crash over the Thanksgiving holiday period. It's one more reason why I'm all too happy to host Thanksgiving every year for my family, most of whom live nearby. My wife, who does the cooking, is less enthused.
- I'm thankful that my teenager is in no rush to drive. I was on my eldest son AJ's case for months to get his driver's permit after he turned 16 in January. He finally did in June, and after a few lessons in the neighborhood, and a lot of my wishing every time he came precariously close to a curb or worse, to another car, I started having second thoughts. I later learned that the fatal crash that put him in the hospital for 18-19 year olds is nearly three times the rate for drivers age 20 and over, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. I've since gotten off AJ's case, and started looking for colleges near train stations.
- I'm thankful that, by some measures, our roads are getting safer. As my colleague Peter Gill recently reported, traffic deaths fell overall on Long Island in 2024, compared to previous years, dropping 24% in Suffolk and holding steady in Nassau. That's a welcome trend, but it's not a silver bullet. It's a number of factors, including increased police enforcement and drivers shedding some bad habits developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, like texting while driving.
- I'm thankful for those fighting through their own grief to make a difference. One of the hardest parts of a reporter's job is reaching out to family members of the recently deceased, and I never knew it personally when a phone is hung up on me or a door slammed in my face. But, in story after story in our *Dangerous Roads* series, Long Islanders have courageously shared their stories of heartbreak and devastation, with the hope that it may help prevent a tragedy like theirs.
- I'm thankful for responsible and conscientious drivers — especially when I'm not being one. For every story Newsday publishes about a *Dangerous Roads* driver incident, there are many more motorists who keep their eyes on the road, slow the speed limit, and do their best to keep themselves, their passengers and everyone else safe. Stuck behind a Sunday driver on Merrick Road recently, I lost my patience and irresponsibly tailed into another lane to get around him, taking off a truck. A special thanks to that driver, who slammed his brakes and potentially saved us both from a wreck.
- I'm thankful for having the platform to discuss such an important topic. For most of my 28 years at Newsday, the idea of writing anything in the first person was downright taboo. But, upon making the call to pursue that incredibly important, yearlong investigative series on Long Island's Dangerous Roads, Newsday editors tapped me to share my own experience as a transportation reporter, motorist and Long Island dad with you each week in *this newsletter*. It's added significantly to my workload, but also to the fulfillment of telling stories for a living.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Readers speak up

This week's email comes from a former Northport resident who moved to Manhattan earlier this year and doesn't miss driving on Long Island.

When waiting to make a left onto Woodhull from 25A I hold my breath that the cars, vans and trucks that come barreling down the Rd don't cross over into my lane. Why don't they have a special left-turn light at this intersection? I moved back to the city despite the random street and subway crime. I feel safer here than driving on Long Island.

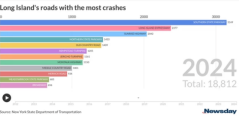
Debbie Carter, Manhattan

Do you think driving on Long Island is more dangerous than in other parts of New York, the U.S. and the world? Let us know at roads@newsday.com.

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