

Special Report

# Crashes Involving City-Owned Vehicles

April 2022



Multiple departments including Fleet Mobility Services, the Law Department, and the Human Resources Department have data related to car crashes involving City vehicles and drivers. Based on data compiled by the Fleet Mobility Services department, City vehicles were involved in 1,855 crashes from fiscal years 2019 through 2021. These crashes resulted in \$8.4 million worth of repairs and replacement vehicles.

City drivers are required to follow federal, state, and local driving laws and to wear seat belts while driving. Currently, the City cannot fully monitor whether employees are wearing seat belts while driving. City drivers are required to report whether they were wearing a seat belt during a crash. The City is in the process of installing a new vehicle monitoring system that will track seat belt use, among other metrics. Individual departments share responsibility with the Human Resources Department for coaching and disciplining City drivers.

---

# Contents

Objective, Background .....	2
What We Learned .....	3
Appendix A: City’s incident report form .....	7
Why We Did This Report, Scope, Methodology .....	8

Cover: Aerial view of downtown Austin, iStock.com/  
RoschetzkyIstockPhoto

---

# Objective

The objective of this special request was to answer the following City Council questions:

1. How frequently does each department have crashes resulting in significant damage?
2. What is the estimated cost in damages, including repairs and liabilities, when determined the City was at fault?
3. How often are City vehicles irreparable (totaled) as a result of a crash, and what are the financial implications?
4. What is the City’s protocol for employee seat belt usage?
5. How often are City drivers involved in crashes where they aren’t wearing a seat belt? How often is there injury or death of a City driver who is not wearing a seat belt?

---

# Background

Multiple departments are responsible for making sure employees use City vehicles in a safe, legal, and courteous manner. The Human Resources Department oversees the City’s Driver Safety Program. The City created the program in 2017 to reduce crashes and reinforce safe driving habits. The program includes a collision review process that helps determine the cause of each crash and discipline unsafe City drivers. Fleet Mobility Services manages the costs related to vehicle damage and repair. The Law Department investigates and processes claims that result from vehicle crashes. Individual departments are responsible for having procedures in place to assign and monitor their drivers.

# What We Learned

## Summary

Multiple departments including Fleet Mobility Services, the Law Department, and the Human Resources Department have data related to car crashes involving City vehicles and drivers. Based on data compiled by the Fleet Mobility Services department, City vehicles were involved in 1,855 crashes from fiscal years 2019 through 2021. These crashes resulted in \$8.4 million worth of repairs and replacement vehicles.

City drivers are required to follow federal, state, and local driving laws and to wear seat belts while driving. Currently, the City cannot fully monitor whether employees are wearing seat belts while driving. City drivers are required to report whether they were wearing a seat belt during a crash. The City is in the process of installing a new vehicle monitoring system that will track seat belt use, among other metrics. Individual departments share responsibility with the Human Resources Department for coaching and disciplining City drivers.

### Question 1

How frequently does each department have crashes resulting in significant damage?

The City's driver safety guidance says vehicles should be driven in a way that avoids injury or property damage. We reviewed crash data involving City-owned vehicles from fiscal years 2019 through 2021. We found that there were over 1,800 crashes during this time frame. Six departments had over 100 crashes each. These departments were Austin Police Department, Austin Water, Austin Resource Recovery, Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services, Parks and Recreation Department, and Austin Fire Department. Almost half of the crashes involved vehicles assigned to the Austin Police Department. Exhibit 1 shows the number of crashes by department.

**Exhibit 1: Number of crashes involving City drivers by department**

Department	Total Number of Crashes
Austin Police Department	882
Austin Water	134
Austin Resource Recovery	131
Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services	126
Parks and Recreation Department	116
Austin Fire Department	109
Other departments	357
<b>Total number of crashes</b>	<b>1,855</b>

Source: Auditor analysis of crashes involving City-owned vehicles from fiscal years 2019 through 2021, February 2022

Of the crashes reported, over 1,300 had associated repair costs. The cost of these repairs averaged around \$1.2 million each year. The extent of the damage in each crash ranged in costs from a few dollars to over \$150,000.

## Question 2

What is the estimated cost in damages, including repairs and liabilities, when determined the City was at fault?

The Law Department is responsible for processing claims to determine if the City is at fault for a crash. We reviewed the crash claim payout data from fiscal years 2019 through 2021. This data included crashes with other vehicles, objects, and pedestrians. These crashes resulted in over \$1.4 million in payouts.

Fleet Mobility Services manages costs related to vehicle damage and repair. We reviewed vehicle crash data for the same period listed above. We found that the City determined it was at fault in at least 871 crashes involving City vehicles (47% of the City's crashes). These crashes resulted in over \$3.2 million of repairs and vehicle replacement costs. Exhibit 2 shows the combined cost of payouts and vehicle damage due to crashes where the City was at fault.

**Exhibit 2: Crashes when the City was at fault cost the City \$4.7 million between fiscal years 2019 to 2021**

Department	Repair and Replacement Cost of Damaged Vehicles	Liability Claim Payouts Due to Vehicle Crashes	Total Cost of Crashes where the City was at Fault
Austin Police Department	\$1,874,289	\$370,627	\$2,244,916
Austin Resource Recovery	\$75,780	\$344,100	\$419,880
Austin Water	\$297,792	\$87,318	\$385,110
Public Works Department	\$170,248	\$127,523	\$297,771
Austin-Travis County Medical Services	\$115,740	\$120,182	\$235,922
Parks and Recreation Department	\$111,950	\$100,734	\$212,684
Austin Fire Department	\$154,519	\$44,299	\$198,818
Other departments	\$472,798	\$246,382	\$719,180
<b>Total cost of crashes</b>	<b>\$3,273,116</b>	<b>\$1,441,165</b>	<b>\$4,714,281</b>

Source: Auditor analysis of vehicle repair and replacement costs and claims payouts for crashes where the City was at fault from fiscal years 2019 through 2021, March 2022

## Question 3

How often are City vehicles irreparable (totaled) as a result of a crash, and what are the financial implications?

We reviewed data on vehicles that were totaled and replaced for fiscal years 2019 through 2021. Our analysis showed that 6% of crashes during this period resulted in a City vehicle being totaled. During our timeframe, 116 City vehicles were totaled with a replacement cost of roughly \$4.8 million. Austin Police Department owned 87 of the 116 totaled vehicles (75%), with a replacement cost of about \$3.1 million.

To offset some of these costs, Fleet management said that the City auctions off totaled vehicles. The money earned from these auctions is transferred to the General Fund and enterprise departments. Fleet management said that in general, they do not budget for vehicles to replace those damaged beyond repair. However, in order to make sure the

Austin Police Department always has the specialized vehicles they need, they make an exception for police pursuit vehicles. In fiscal year 2022, for example, Fleet budgeted for 10 reserve vehicles for police at a cost of approximately \$500,000.

## Question 4

### What is the City’s protocol for employee seat belt usage?

The City has guidance and training related to driver safety, but only makes references to seat belt use. City employees can access the guidance online. The guidance says drivers must follow federal, state, and local traffic laws or they will be subject to disciplinary action. We reviewed the guidance and found that City drivers must use seat belts while the vehicle is in motion. Employees covered by the City’s Municipal Civil Service rules can be disciplined for unacceptable personal conduct and unsafe driving behavior when it violates traffic laws. These rules cover most City employees, but certain positions including police officers, fire fighters, and temporary employees do not fall under these rules. We found limited information on how drivers are disciplined if they do not wear their seat belt. Exhibit 3 shows the guidance on seat belt use and if this guidance includes disciplinary actions.

**Exhibit 3: City’s guidance on seat belt use**

Type of Guidance	Includes Guidance on Seat Belt Use	Includes Guidance on Seat Belt Discipline
Administrative Bulletin - Employee Vehicle Policy	No	No
Administrative Bulletin - Operating City Vehicles and Equipment	Yes	No
Administrative Bulletin - Using and Protecting City Vehicles and Equipment	No	No
Municipal Civil Service - Unacceptable Personal Conduct and Unsafe Behavior	No	Yes*
Occupational Safety and Health Resource Guide	Yes	No
Driver Safety Program	Yes	No
Driver Safety Standards	No**	No

\*These rules do not apply to certain positions including police officers, fire fighter, and temporary employees

\*\*No guidance on seat belt use for City drivers, only use for child passengers

Source: Auditor analysis of guidance on seat belt use, April 2022

The Human Resources Department tracks violations accrued by City employees. Any driving violation can add points to the employee’s record regardless if it occurred while driving on City business or not. Points are added based on the type of violation. Employees who accumulate more than 12 points over the previous 36 months cannot drive on City business.

A City driver involved in a crash must fill out an incident report within 24 hours. This incident report includes a question that asks if the driver was wearing a seat belt. Drivers are expected to self-report this information, as seen in Appendix A. It is unclear if failing to wear a seat belt will result in points added to an employee's record. Individual departments share responsibility with the Human Resources Department for coaching and disciplining City drivers.

## Question 5

How often are City drivers involved in crashes where they aren't wearing a seat belt? How often is there injury or death of a City driver who is not wearing a seat belt?

Fleet Mobility Services is in the process of installing a new vehicle monitoring system in all City-owned vehicles. This technology will allow the City to collect information on fuel usage, vehicle maintenance, and employee driving habits.

Once installation is complete, departments will need time to collect information on employee driving habits, including seat belt usage. Until then, we cannot determine how often drivers are involved in crashes while not wearing a seat belt or how often injury may result from those crashes.

About one-third of City departments have the new system. The full rollout should be complete by the end of 2022. Exhibit 4 shows the timeline for installing the technology for several key departments.

**Exhibit 4: Fleet's timeline to install new vehicle monitoring system**



Source: Auditor analysis of vehicle monitoring timeline, April 2022

# Appendix A: City's incident report form that requires drivers to self report seat belt use after a crash



## City of Austin

### Vehicle/Equipment Collision Incident Report

Submit Section I of this form within 24 hours of the incident to Department Safety Liaison. Please complete entire form and do not leave any sections blank. If section does not apply mark N/A.

SECTION I: INITIAL 24-HOUR FORM	
Completed by: <input type="checkbox"/> EMPLOYEE <input type="checkbox"/> SUPERVISOR	
Date of Collision	Time
Day of the week	Posted Speed Limit    MPH
Location of Collision	
CITY DRIVER AND VEHICLE INFORMATION	
Driver Name	Employee #
City Dept.	Workgroup/division
Job Title	Driver's License #
Work Location	<input type="checkbox"/> Class C <input type="checkbox"/> CDL-A <input type="checkbox"/> CDL-B <input type="checkbox"/> CDL-C
Work Phone	Supervisor name
Name(s) of other employees in the City Vehicle:	
1.	2.
3.	4.
What type of vehicle/equipment was involved?    Commercial Vehicle? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Sedan <input type="checkbox"/> Van <input type="checkbox"/> Service Body <input type="checkbox"/> Front End Loader <input type="checkbox"/> Trailer <input type="checkbox"/> Pickup <input type="checkbox"/> Dump Truck <input type="checkbox"/> Lift Truck <input type="checkbox"/> Backhoe <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	
Vehicle Make	Vehicle Model
City Vehicle #	License Plate #
Were you wearing your seat belt? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
were you injured? (if yes, complete separate injury Report Form) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Were any passengers in your vehicle injured? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Was the vehicle damaged? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Was a vehicle pre-trip inspection done? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

---

## Why We Did This Report

---

This report responds to a request from Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison as a sponsor and Council Member Alison Alter as a co-sponsor regarding employee seat belt usage and costs.

---

## Scope

---

The project scope included employee seat belt usage and costs for fiscal years 2019 through 2021.

---

## Methodology

---

To complete this special request, we performed the following steps:

- Interviewed staff in the Human Resources Department, the Law Department, and the Fleet Mobility Services department
- Reviewed federal, state, and local traffic laws on seat belt usage
- Reviewed policies, procedures, and other documentation related to employee driver safety and seat belt use
- Reviewed training materials on the City's Driver Safety Program and the City's Connected Vehicle Program
- Analyzed vehicle crash data for fiscal years 2019 through 2021
- Analyzed irreparable or totaled vehicle data for fiscal years 2019 through 2021
- Analyzed claim payout data for fiscal years 2019 through 2021

---

## Project Type

---

Special request projects conducted by the Office of the City Auditor are considered non-audit projects under Government Auditing Standards and are conducted in accordance with the ethics and general standards (Chapters 1-3).



The Office of the City Auditor was created by the Austin City Charter as an independent office reporting to City Council to help establish accountability and improve City services. Special requests are designed to answer specific questions to assist Council in decision-making. We do not draw conclusions or make recommendations in these reports.

#### **Team**

Keith Salas, Audit Manager  
Kathie Harrison, Auditor-in-Charge  
Anna Morris  
Alaina Turnquist

#### **City Auditor**

Corrie Stokes

#### **Deputy City Auditor**

Jason Hadavi

#### **Office of the City Auditor**

**phone:** (512) 974-2805

**email:** [AustinAuditor@austintexas.gov](mailto:AustinAuditor@austintexas.gov)

**website:** <http://www.austintexas.gov/auditor>



AustinAuditor



@AustinAuditor

Copies of our audit reports are available at  
<http://www.austintexas.gov/page/audit-reports>

*Alternate formats available upon request*