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Headline: Violence, Urban expansion relate to increasing number of car accidents in Los Angeles

Deck: Heavier concentration of accidents have to do with factors like gang violence and human trafficking in LA.

Last year, senior communication sciences and disorders major Mika Licudine was driving on the 710 in East Los Angeles when she was hit eight times as she merged from the far left lane to the right. She has been in two car accidents in the past year alone, and has spent over five months in treatment for a back injury she incurred.

Licudine's story is not uncommon. According to the LAPD, there were over 55 thousand car accidents reported in 2022. This is no surprise to the native—the opening scene of *La La Land* illustrates what is a typical day in the life of an Angeleno. But traffic in Los Angeles is no opening dance number, as the numbers for deadly car accidents have been in the triple digits for the last two years.

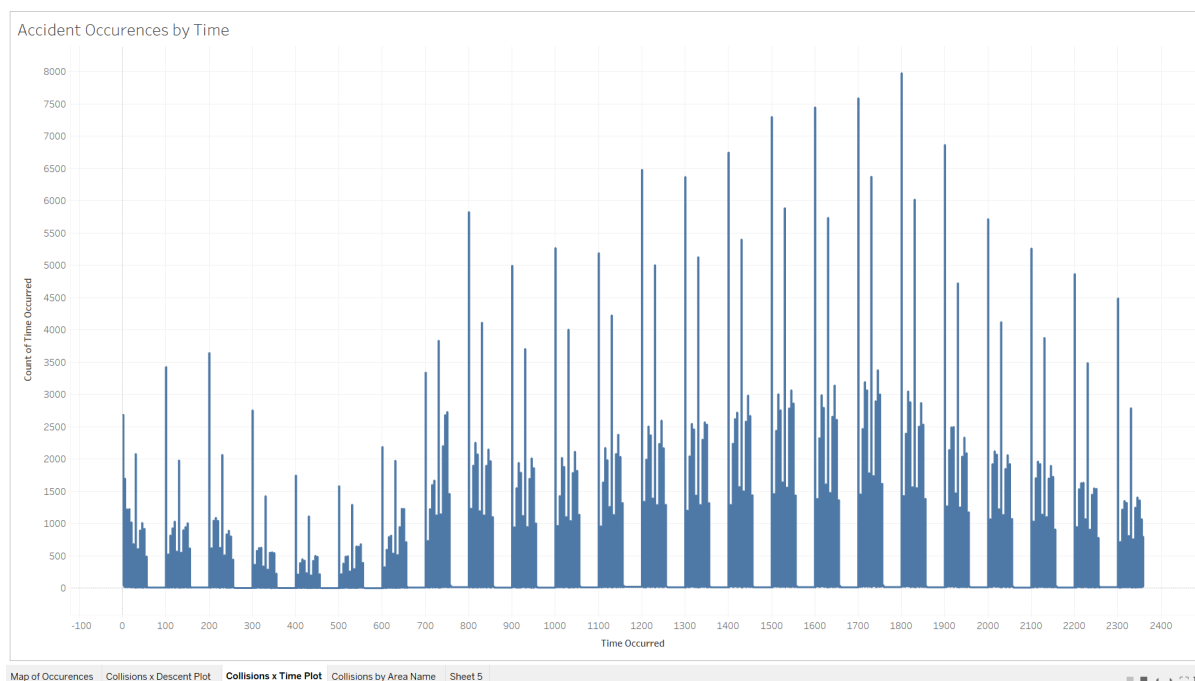
URBAN EXPANSION RELATES TO CONGESTION

Los Angeles has grown exponentially since its foundations in the early 20th century, to 3.8 million people in its current day, expanding at a rate for which is impossible to plan. Logan Kightly, a master's civil engineering student at San Diego State University, commented on this

phenomenon. Kightly says that one of the main reasons LA is so notorious for traffic is because of a city planning problem he termed “Urban Expansion.”

“Los Angeles is an example of what's called urban expansion, which essentially means that they built the city of Los Angeles but didn't account for the expansion that would be necessary,” Kightly said. “...They just added roads and bridges on top of each other. So if you go down to Los Angeles, I mean, it looks like a mess, right? ... So essentially, the roads that are the expansion system are a lot more congested because there's no forethought going into it for the population size.”

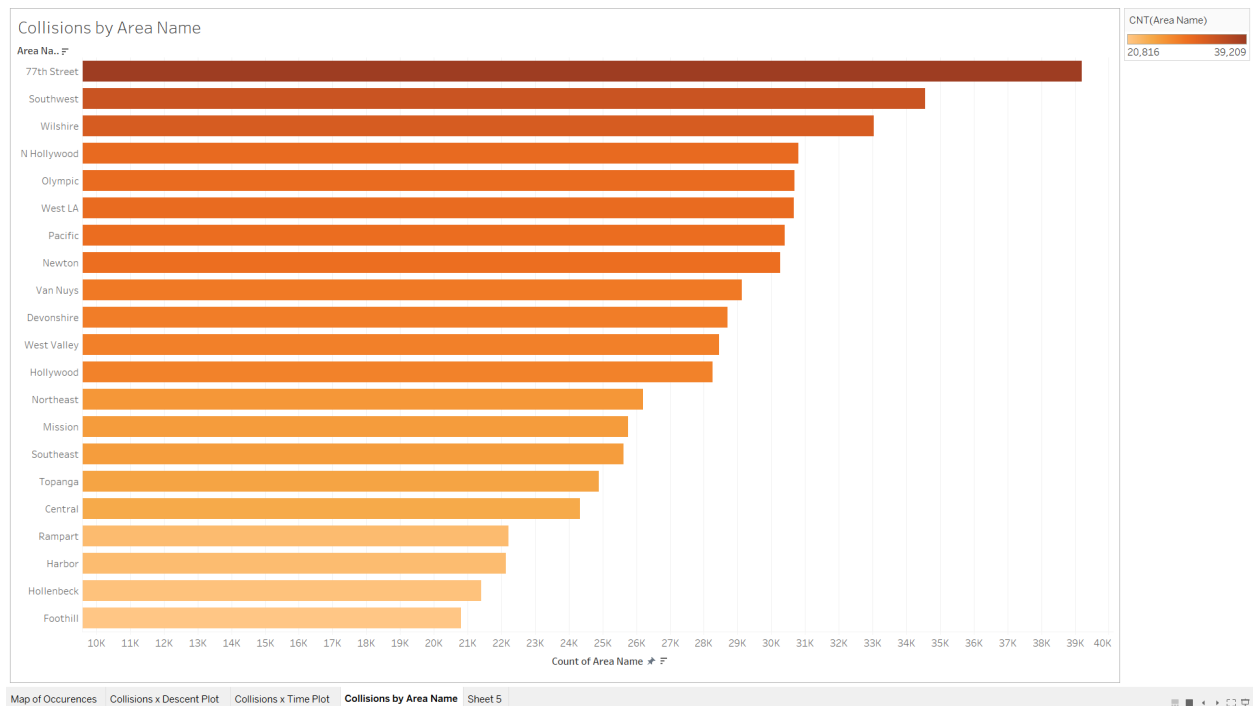
Kightly has a good point. Between 1950 and 2020, the population of Los Angeles grew from approximately 1.97 million to 3.9 million people, representing a population growth rate of over 97%, according to the [US Census Bureau](#). Los Angeles is a city that has continually grown outwards, instead of upwards, which adds to the complexity of the road systems throughout. According to our analysis, the highest amount of accidents happen in Los Angeles when this congestion occurs during peak rush hours.



[There are about eleven major bottlenecks in Los Angeles county](#), of which most are located on major Freeways and cross-streets. This kind of construction creates opportunity for side-swipe accidents and driver confusion, which can cause road construction related accidents, even if the driver was being responsible.

VIOLENT PEOPLE, VIOLENT DRIVERS

And while lack of city planning and forethought plays into the Angeleno traffic problem, a key factor of the accident problem is the correlation between street violence, gang areas, and poverty with the highest concentration of accidents. According to an analysis of LA City data, the most accidents reported occur with the tag of 77th street, an area in southeast Los Angeles known for being more violent, less affluent and less trusting of cops in general, according to an article by the [Hello SoCal published in April 2022](#).



Just behind this area in rate of accidents is the Southwest division, another area in the south of Los Angeles known for being full of gang violence and drug abuse.

Detective Ryan Moreno of the LAPD Vehicular Homicide Unit has worked for over a decade in the South side of L.A. County and confirmed the correlation between accident rate and the temperament of the areas.

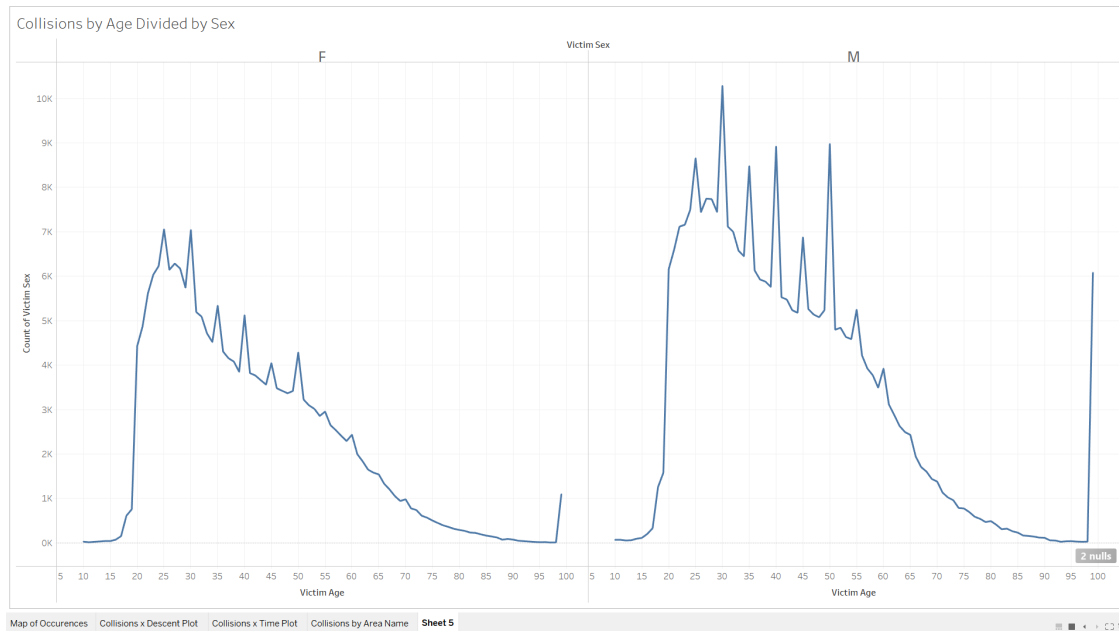
“A lot of our fatalities, unfortunately, are criminal because of the nature [of how] they were driving,” Moreno said. “You know, whether it's anything like DUI or hit and runs ... a lot of it's just reckless driving. People driving three, four times the speed limit, running red lights, running stop signs, just absolutely zero regard for any human life or safety.”

Moreno linked this driving with the personality and mentality common of people from more violent areas of Los Angeles.

“What I noticed with cars is that a lot of times it's an extension of people's personality, of how they are the way they drive. So I look at it as a bullying personality of some of the drivers.”

Moreno said.

In an analysis of LA county accidents, men are more prone to accidents than women, which is not surprising. But Moreno offered helpful interpretation when he talked about the male personalities in these seedy areas, who may be ringleaders of prostitution or drug trafficking.



“The pimps, for example” Moreno explains, “are really aggressive because they kind of go in and out of there. They're monitoring the girls on the street and seeing who's where, and that's how they kind of keep tabs on them. And in those areas, you'll see some of the most just crazy, dangerous, aggressive driving that you've ever seen. ... it's sad because we have a lot of people that go there because it's kind of like LA's “red light” district.”

ROAD CONSTRUCTION IN THE “RED LIGHTS” OF LA

Often, roads are improved upon or constructed with enough citizens or residents of the street speaking out. But Moreno also mentioned that residents of “Red Light” districts may be less motivated to report poor road conditions, as low lighting can create the perfect cover for drug deals or getaways.

“We've got a lot of people killed on Central Avenue in between like Manchester and 92nd and Century,” Moreno said. “One thing we noticed there has been a lot of fatalities over the last few

years ... it's really dark. ... They'll say that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. That community has a lot of ... prostitution and drugs by the gangs so like, no one really complains about it from the community ... because they're less detected. It's a thing, but the trade off is that people do get hit at night and there are accidents.”

The traffic problems in Los Angeles, then, are multi-faceted, indicative of deeply-rooted societal problems. Los Angeles is going to need more than another street light to illuminate the murkiness of this growing and deadly problem.