

Highly visible “wrong way” signs are posted at the end of off-ramps from all major highways in New Hampshire, but they aren’t enough to keep scores of drivers from turning onto the ramps and winding up driving in the wrong direction on the highway.

DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER

Blame drinking and driving, distractions, fatigue, GPS directions, lighting, signs or engineering of on- and off-ramps, but there have been hundreds of wrong-way drivers on New Hampshire highways recently.

Hundreds? Try 271 in 366 days in 2024, according to State Police. This year, legislators and officials in the departments of safety and transportation are trying to head off the problem before someone dies in a head-on crash.

One way is through [House Bill 776](#), which made it out of committee Wednesday with unanimous support and is expected to pass this year. The bill would add wrong-way driving to the list of factors that elevate driving while intoxicated or impaired to aggravated DWI, thus bringing stiffer penalties.

Although State Police Lt. Chris Storm said troopers have heard all kinds of excuses from wrong-way drivers, most people caught driving the wrong way have been using drugs or alcohol.

“The legislative change aims to enhance the penalties for impaired drivers who engage in such dangerous behavior, thereby serving as a deterrent against impaired driving,” Storm said in an email Thursday.



A State Police cruiser illuminates the car of a Massachusetts woman who was stopped after allegedly driving south in the northbound lanes of Interstate 93 from Ashland to Sanbornton in November. The driver was charged with driving while intoxicated and reckless conduct.

Provided by NH State Police

A separate bill, [HB 466](#), would make it so anyone who refuses to take a blood alcohol test would lose their license for one year while those who take the test and fail would still face a six-month suspension.

State transportation and safety agencies have also created the Wrong Way Driver Action Plan, which will look at all the causes of the dangerous trend.

“We’re chasing ghosts. We don’t know where they’re getting on,” New Hampshire Highway Safety Administrator William Lambert said Thursday. “In the past, it was always a much lower number of incidents, but lately, a lot more people are taking notice and reporting wrong-way drivers. It seems like State Police almost every day are sending out a press release about another wrong-way driver.”

Lambert said transportation officials are working with a nationally recognized consultant to identify ways to address the problem. The first step is to look at the state’s highway infrastructure and identify the high-risk locations based on geometry, traffic volume and proximity to places that serve alcohol.

“They will also develop a hierarchy of countermeasures to address wrong-way entry to highways — signage and pavement marking, up to vehicle detection and communication technologies,” Lambert said.

The next phase would be to bring those safety measures and strategies to high-risk locations, he said.

#### 2024 statistics

Of those 271 wrong-way drivers on New Hampshire highways last year, most corrected their mistakes quickly, but troopers had to help 24 drivers out of their blunders.

Of those 24, State Police arrested 20. Five were charged with negligent driving, reckless driving or reckless conduct with a deadly weapon.

The other 15 were charged with driving while intoxicated or impairment offenses.

#### 2024 crashes

Wrong-way driving led to five collisions last year. Two of those wrong-way drivers crashed into guardrails or fixed objects. One hit construction equipment in a highway work zone.

Another wrong-way driver narrowly avoided a head-on crash after the driver heading in the correct direction took evasive action. However, the right-way driver barreled into a guardrail and suffered minor injuries, police said.

One wrong-way driver hit a police cruiser head-on at low speed after the cruiser’s positioning and lighting persuaded the wrong-way driver to slow down significantly, State Police said.

GPS a culprit?

Storm said there have been instances in which drivers say their GPS navigation systems led them the wrong way.

“While GPS technology has significantly improved over the years, it isn’t infallible,” he said. “Factors such as outdated maps, incorrect data, and user error can contribute to navigation mistakes.

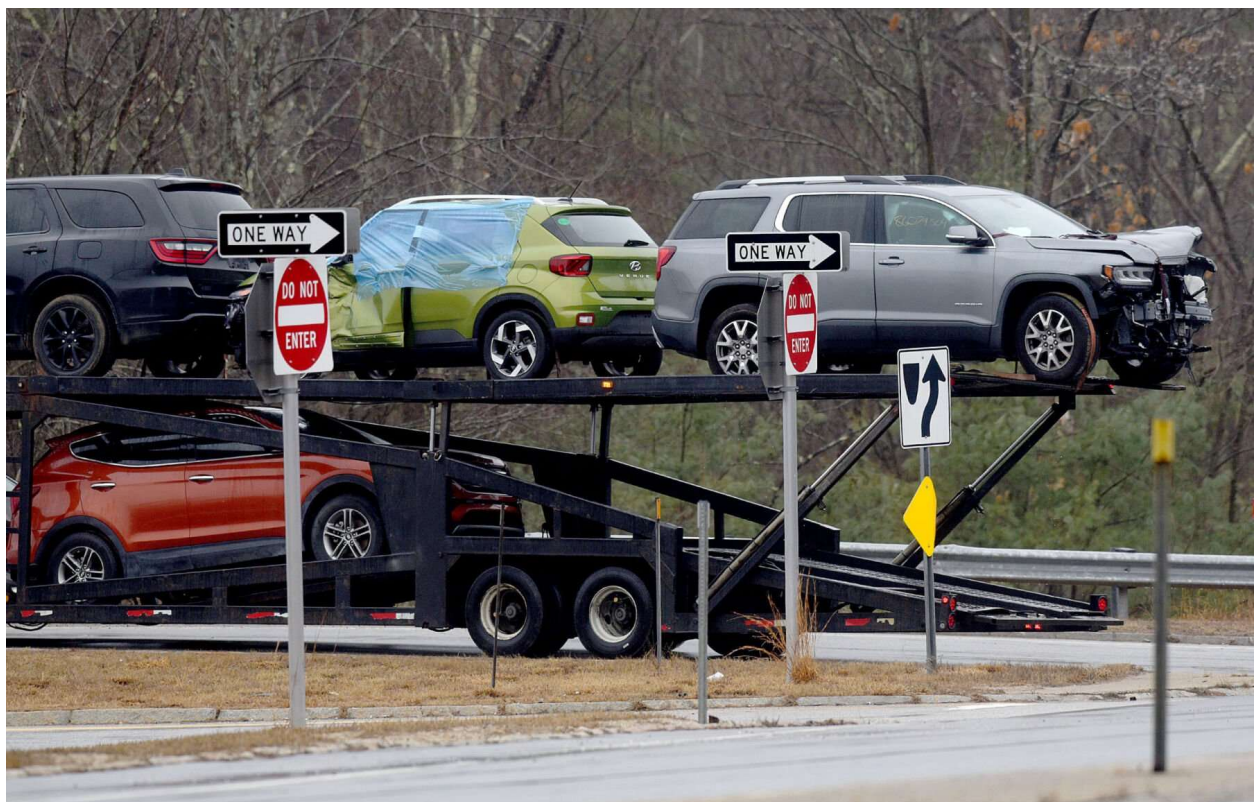
“Furthermore, reliance on GPS can sometimes lead to inattentiveness. Drivers become overly dependent on their devices and fail to pay attention to road signs or their surroundings, increasing the risk of making wrong turns or driving in the wrong direction.

“The ultimate problems continue to be impairment, distraction and at times, medical issues,” he said.

#### Other wrong-way factors

Lambert said impairment is not just drugs or alcohol, many drivers suffer from cognitive impairment and distraction.

Sometimes like a group (or slice) of proverbial lemmings heading off a cliff.



The proximity of entrance and exit ramps sometimes plays a role in wrong-way driving. Here, a tractor-trailer carrying damaged vehicles turns toward the on-ramps to Route 101’s Exit 3 from Route 43 in Candia. Just to the truck’s left is the end of the exit ramps, marked by “Do Not Enter” and “One Way” signs.

DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER

“I have seen video from Massachusetts where the first vehicle in a left-turn lane at a traffic signal took a sharp left to the highway exit ramp, which was adjacent to the entrance ramp. Not surprisingly, the next six or eight vehicles in the queue followed the first vehicle up the wrong ramp until they all realized they were going the wrong way. “

He said that the proximity of on- and off-ramps isn't necessarily the problem; it's more likely whatever is going on with the driver.

“Interchange geometry does contribute to a degree, but only because drivers are either impaired or distracted, or both,” Lambert said.

#### Recent incidents

Just this past week, State Police reported two wrong-way driving arrests.

On Friday, troopers arrested Robert Cresta, 70, of Kittery, Maine, after an incident on Interstate 95. Cresta allegedly crossed into the southbound lanes after passing through the Hampton toll plaza.

Police said he continued north at slow speeds in the high-speed breakdown lane until a trooper blocked his vehicle with their cruiser, though Cresta allegedly swerved and caused minor collisions with other vehicles before stopping.

Cresta was charged with aggravated DWI and felony reckless conduct and possession of a controlled drug.

A [Bedford man was accused of driving the wrong way](#) while impaired on Interstate 293 in Manchester, State Police said. Kyle Loconte, 37, was arrested after crashing into guardrails near Exit 2 at 9:42 p.m. on St. Patrick's Day.

Four other arrests were reported earlier this month.

On March 13, Kendra Malone, 44, of Manchester [allegedly drove the wrong way](#) for several miles on Interstate 93 between Concord and Manchester and drew gunfire from a state trooper, police said.

A [wrong-way driver was charged](#) after four people were injured in a head-on crash on I-93 in Plymouth on Feb. 17. Jason Buttrick, 33, of Ashland was charged with DWI, second offense, police said.

State Police [arrested William Heffron Jr.](#), 55, of Meredith after he allegedly drove the wrong way on I-93 in Ashland.

Although out of state, on Feb. 19, [Cole M. Sevigny, 26, of Hudson was killed](#) by a wrong-way driver in upstate New York.

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