

## A Look at Houston's Worst (And Most Dangerous) Commutes

No one who lives in the Houston area will be surprised to learn that we have some of the toughest commutes in the country. Even so, the seriousness of the problem is staggering.

[Channel 2 Investigates](#) took a look at some of the worst commutes in Houston, including I-45 from Farm-to-Market Road 646 downtown at 7:30 AM (53 minutes) and State Way 288 from Pearland to downtown (nearly 40 minutes). As we get into the spring and summer, those times may get even worse due to road construction.

The good news is that relief is on the way due to new traffic patterns, according to Danny Perez of the Texas Department of Transportation. Channel 2 also found that drivers who leave early in the morning will encounter less traffic. Still, in a large city like Houston, some degree of gridlock is unavoidable.

We've seen time and again what can happen when wrecks occur in that heavy traffic.

### Breaking down accident risks in Houston gridlock

One of the most common causes of [car accidents](#) in heavy traffic is **distracted driving**. The longer motorists are in the car, the more likely they are to whip out their smartphones or tablets or engage in other distracting behaviors behind the wheel.

Many drivers think it's safe to read or send a text message during the "stop" part of stop-and-go traffic, for example. The problem is that even if you finish physically sending the text while your vehicle is stopped, **your brain remains distracted** for a minute or two afterward – and during that time, you're putting yourself and others at risk.

Another common hazard in heavy traffic is **tailgating**. Closely following the car in front of you won't get you to your destination any faster, but many Houston drivers do it anyway. While tailgating, the vehicle in front of you obscures your vision, making it harder to see and react to hazards. When tailgaters slam on their brakes, the vehicles behind *them* may not have enough time to react, causing a crash or even a multi-vehicle pileup.

More generally, **aggressive or reckless driving** is a serious problem in heavy traffic. Many motorists weave from lane to lane or drive too fast when they have a rare stretch of open highway in order to get ahead. The truth is that you're unlikely to shave more than a minute or two off your commute with these tactics, if even that. How often have you seen someone speed past you only to come to a screeching halt behind the next car in front of you?

### The best ways to avoid an accident during your commute

Under Texas law, motorists are required to exercise due caution in order to avoid causing accidents. The more cars on the road, the more important it is to be careful. Here are a few ways to stay safe in gridlock:

**Plan ahead:** Give yourself plenty of time to get to your destination. Use apps like Waze or Google Maps *before* you start your trip to get a sense of your travel time. (Don't stare at them while you're driving, though – again, distracted driving is dangerous!)

**Maintain safe following distance:** Again, tailgating is dangerous. Leave plenty of room in case the car in front of you stops short. If someone cuts in front of you, brake slowly in order to gradually build that following distance back up.

**Keep your attention on the road:** Just because you're going slowly doesn't mean you can afford to take your eyes off the road. Avoid distractions and put your phone away.

**Don't rush:** See an opening? Odds are that you aren't the only driver who sees it – and if you rush into it, you may get sideswiped or T-boned. Unless you absolutely need to move over, it's best to stay in your lane.

**Signal your intentions clearly:** If you do need to change lanes, use your turn signals and maneuver carefully. If your exit is coming up, move over ahead of time instead of cutting into the right lane at the last minute.

**Stay calm:** We know this can be difficult, but it's important. No matter how frustrating your commute is, driving aggressively is only going to make it worse. Keep your cool and drive defensively until you're at your destination.

Ultimately, though, the only driver you can control is yourself. When you are sharing the road with thousands of other motorists, there is always the danger that another driver's negligence will cause a wreck that leaves you hurt. If that happened to you, [contact](#) Smith & Hassler, Attorneys at Law, for a free legal consultation.