



CDTC Safety Summit – Meeting Summary
June 13, 2018

Summit Participants:

- Kelley Baker, AAA Northway
- Audrey Burnson, NYSDOT
- Kathy Casey, ACB
- Don Csaposs, Town of Guilderland
- Peter Barber, Guilderland
- Tricia Bulatao, Albany City DOH
- Regina Doyle, NYSDOT
- Aubrey Feldman, GTSC
- John Gillivan, Village of Colonie Bike/Ped Advocate
- Gina Gillooley, NYS DOH
- Brent Irving, CDTA
- Paul Kirwan, Albany Police Department
- Maureen Kozakiewicz, NYS GTSC
- Tracy Mance, Albany County Sheriff's Department
- Kate Maynard, City of Saratoga Springs
- Emmett McDevitt, FHWD
- Monica Ryan, Town of Sand Lake
- Elwood Sloat, Town of Malta Traffic Safety Committee
- Yasmine Syed, Town of Niskayuna
- Monique Wahba, Town of Colonie
- Chris Wallin, City of Schenectady
- Tom Werner, CDTC Policy Board
- Ben Zadrozny, NYSMSP/MSF
- Jim Mearkle, Albany County
- Lt. Ken Pero, Colonie Police Department

The Safety Summit started with a brief welcome and project introduction from Mike Franchini and Sandy Misiewicz from CDTC. Representatives from VHB then relayed some preliminary findings from the initial data evaluation and discussed the goals for the summit and the study. After the introduction and presentation, a panel discussion occurred. Each panelist provided a summary of their work with traffic safety and identified what they considered important trends, problems, and opportunities regarding traffic safety as briefly outlined below.



PANEL SESSION

Panelists

- **Frank Gross, VHB**
 - Discussed case studies from around the country where communities adopted a system of systemic countermeasures (striping, signage) that reduce risk across the entire system using lower cost improvements.
 - The systemic approach is a newer way of thinking about traffic safety, but the data shows that smaller amounts of money invested in many locations is more effective at reducing the overall number of fatal and serious injury crashes than the same amount of money spent at one location.
 - The implementation plan for the systemic countermeasures must be consistent with the findings of the data analysis.
- **Jim Mearkle, Traffic Engineer, Albany County**
 - Albany County roads are mostly low volume with a high percentage in rural areas. Many crashes are single vehicle crashes with vehicles leaving the road.
 - Low cost safety improvements are key. For example, signing multiple sharp curves to keep motorists on the road.
 - There is a Cornell Local Roads program workshop coming up in Greene County related to low cost safety improvements.
 - Albany County paves about 20% of their roads each year. Keeping the roads in good condition helps to reduce some types of crashes.
 - Weathering is more of a problem on rural roads.
 - Need to work with local planning boards on how they scope traffic impact studies – they mostly look at delay not safety and safety should be a part of the process. The Highway Safety Manual has been around for quite some time but hasn't been used the way the Highway Capacity Manual has. Look at the "Interactive Highway Safety Design Model" as a resource for evaluating the safety of various road designs.
- **Lt. Ken Pero, Traffic Safety Lieutenant, Colonie Police Department**
 - The Town of Colonie has a 250,000 business day population and 80,000 residents.
 - Aggressive driving is worse since there is so much traffic volume and people get frustrated by delays.
 - Pedestrian fatalities along Central Ave have been a problem but working with DOT has reduced serious crashes and improved safety.
 - Land use matters. People would walk across Central Avenue between hotels and businesses. When the hotels were closed the pedestrian crashes on that segment of Central Avenue stopped.
 - The installation of "yield to pedestrians" signage has helped to call attention to pedestrians at intersections.
 - Click It or Ticket has been around a long time and seatbelt compliance in New York is now between 93 and 94%.
 - See! Be Seen! campaign is getting more exposure. Pedestrians are ticketed as well as automobile drivers.
 - Need campaign to protect motorcyclists.



- **Regina Doyle, NYSDOT**
 - NYSDOT and the Governor’s Traffic Safety Committee (GTSC) have a lot of good data and analysis regarding safety.
 - State Strategic Highway Safety Plan – The vision statement “Roads in NY will be safer to use for all users” indicates the need to bring all partners together to develop data driven plans to guide the spending of limited safety funds in the most effective way to reduce serious and fatal crashes.
 - Highway Safety Improvement Program - Looks at hot spots across the state and asks regions to study 20% of the hot spots every year – these can result in systemic as well as individual location improvements.
 - Pedestrian Safety Action Plan – Focuses on education, engineering and enforcement initiatives. Through the plan, low cost systemic changes, such as signing, back plates, refuge islands, curb extensions, and striping, have been implemented at 3,800 locations on state roads. The state just announced \$40 million in funding to incorporate systemic pedestrian project at the local level.
 - Pedestrian enforcement week is coming up and is a good example of partnerships. GTSC is releasing its third public service announcement on intersection safety, pedestrians, and distracted driving.
- **Chris Wallin, City Engineer, City of Schenectady**
 - The City has some flexibility in how they do things.
 - New development has seen a lot of momentum. 10 to 15 years ago the City didn’t ask a lot of the developers. Now the City is more active and more selective about projects and requires pedestrian improvements from developers.
 - A current focus is on a balance between safe pedestrian access vs. construction in the downtown where space and right-of-way are limited.
 - At construction sites on Erie Blvd and South Ferry Street the City is allowing the contractors to close the sidewalk-as long as the closures make sense together and do not require pedestrians to travel back and forth across State Street several times.
 - Today people expect different things, like covered walkways in construction zones.
 - In a recent capital project, the City put in a mid-block pedestrian island to allow pedestrians to more easily cross between land uses on opposite sides of the street. The developer wants to remove the island to accommodate occasional tractor trailer access into their site.
 - Creativity with lighting, especially at the rail road crossings, have made a huge difference in pedestrian safety and comfort.
 - The City has invested in many pedestrian amenities like crosswalks, flashing control, full ADA compliant crossings, but people still cross at the wrong place. A full barrier was installed on Washington Avenue adjacent to SCCC to force pedestrians to the traffic signal to cross the street. Barriers can be made more attractive with decorative fencing and landscaping.
 - The City uses speed signs on utility posts to track data. There’s not a lot of speeding in the City. Schenectady has citywide Wi-Fi with cameras for license plate tracking and traffic volume data resulting in more available data for transportation and safety evaluations.
 - Consistency between traffic control devices is an issue – pedestrian crossings are not all the same and people are confused by the technology. Noted that people don’t realize the pedestrian crossing at Jay Street gives pedestrians an immediate walk signal.



- State Street downtown has no bike lanes, but that wasn't the priority 15 years ago. The City has now come full circle and talks about removing parking in some areas for bike lanes.

After the panelist discussions on traffic safety trends, problems, and solutions, a question and answer period was opened. The questions and answers are summarized below. The questions are summarized by topic and are not necessarily in chronological order.

Questions and Answers

Moderator: Is reporting by enforcement accurate?

The police crash report forms ask for a lot of data but is it enough? Is it the right data? What data sets are missing (when 'other' box is checked)?

- Lt Pero said the biggest challenge is getting someone to admit they were on the phone. Police cannot check 'phones' unless it's a serious accident and then it needs a court order. In Colonie, if they check "other" they're supposed to write a description of why they chose "other."
- Jim Mearkle noted that within the contributing factor identified as "human error", some crashes are driver distraction, but an engineering issue may have increased the risk of a crash in other cases.
- When human error is found to be the cause, what caused the human error?
- Texting while driving and phone use in crash data is under-represented.
- Pedestrian error not broken down by what the error is or what caused the pedestrian error.
- Horse drawn carriage crashes are an issue in some parts of the state.
- Parking lot crashes are not well documented.
- Wrong way crashes are difficult to document without a picture.
- Cell use goes unreported a lot of the time.
- Regina noted that the state is revising the crash report form to include parking lot crashes and provide more clarity.

Audience question: Why are there so few weather-related crashes?

- People tend to drive slower during bad weather, therefore there aren't many fatal or serious injury crashes. Total crashes may increase but they tend to be less intense and severe. People may still not be driving safely for the conditions, but conditions are still generally slow enough to reduce crash severity.

Moderator: Lane departure crashes (driving off road) for the four-county area are trending higher, why?

- There are a lot of things to look at on the car screen that distract people. They are promoted as safety and convenience features but may be distracting.
- Cars are designed to go faster, move more smoothly, and be quieter – people are probably driving faster without realizing it.



- In planning we rely on reported data on lane departures to identify whether the crash is on a curve or a straight segment on the road and often the data does not give us a full picture. Summaries of data sets are relied upon because there is so much data out there. Now police report data online and future reporting systems might offer more and better data.
- 25% of all lane departure crashes are on roadway curves.
- Cell phone use and texting may not be the primary factor, but are a contributing factor for most crashes.
- Regina – some systemic improvements are rumble strips (center and shoulder) and curve warning signs with an MUTCD compliance date of 2019.
- Audience Comment – Motorcyclists sit up higher and see everything. They see that everyone is texting – cell phone usage seems to be a component in most accidents.

Audience Question: Is there a certain time of day for the most serious fatal accidents? Age groups that have the most serious crashes?

- Project team is still in the process of breaking down the data to show some of these trends.
- Glare at night becomes an issue, especially for older drivers. We can look closer at older drivers and younger drivers for education. GTSC sees the most prevalent victims of crashes are young males in late afternoon and early evening. There are also more crashes between November and February compared to other times of the year.
- Baby boomers staying active and living in communities without sidewalks can be an issue as the group ages.
- Audience Comment – See www.safeny.ny.gov, which offers a variety of data.

Moderator: Motorcycle crashes trend higher in the four-county area compared to the rest of the State. 26% of crashes are motorcycle crashes, but when looking at serious injuries/fatalities the trend changes to 40% involving motorcycles. Why?

- Audience Comment – (Ben) Speed and alcohol account for 30% of motorcycle crashes (ranked 1 and 2 in contributing factors). These are decisions that riders make and are hard to change. Motorcycle Safety Federation has full support for enforcement activities.
- Motorcyclists often buy a bike that is too large or more powerful than they can handle. “Ride your own ride” and don’t ride above your skill level. Motorcyclists need consistent training to relearn the basic rider skills and get rid of bad habits. This education is truly lifesaving.
- Looked at a lot of crash reports and it seems like 50% of crashes are the fault of the motorcyclists and 50% are the fault of the passenger vehicle driver. Many motorcycle crashes are single-vehicle lane departure crashes.

Moderator: What are the impacts of Uber, Lyft, and other rideshare services?

Do you see anything trending differently? Any statistics yet about how this is going so far?

- There’s no good public data yet, at this point the data would be from the private companies. If data was available who would monitor and analyze it?



- City of Albany has designated areas for ride sharing. It will take time for the data to become available because it's all still quite new and the current data sets are only through 2016.
- Schenectady has noticed an increase in parking issues and more pedestrians because of the casino, but so far no trends in ride sharing.
- Lyft does their own data evaluation. Their data has indicated reduced DWI tickets.
- There is a lag in data sets (looking at 2016 data now).
- CDTA may be a model for data evaluation because they do track data. What are the changes ridership with the introduction of Uber and Lyft?

Moderator: For Schenectady, with the addition of the casino are there any transportation issues related to the increase in the number of visitors to the area?

- Some problems associated with people parking on Erie Boulevard.
- The data needs to be detailed and accurate because we want to make sure that we're addressing the real issue. Design solutions aren't always the answer when the problem is really education. Much of our information is anecdotal and there is concern that the ability to address safety concerns is getting more difficult. A systemic approach to safety improvements could provide a way for implementation to move forward step by step.
- Education is important. Do we need to find "sister areas" that we are really similar to in order to compare trends? Can FHWA help us with this type of comparison?
- Vehicle miles traveled is down for younger people, do they have sufficient driving skills?
- Regina – Our fatal crashes in New York are going down statewide vs nationally.
- Lt. Pero – Central Avenue is the main area of concern in Colonie. The police force tickets pedestrians heavily on Central Avenue though some officers do not write as many tickets and are more likely to instruct the pedestrians on what to do rather than write the ticket.
- Pedestrians crossing at the wrong place (not at intersections or crosswalks) is a concern. Making the corridor very brightly lit can help.

Audience Question: Are education programs helping and/or working?

- Regina – It's hard to know if the education programs are working. For example, the four county area fatality trends, compared to the rest of state are going down, but we're not sure why.
- A very large number of tickets were given out during the first year of the "See! Be Seen!" campaign. The campaign is only two years old; during the second year, tickets were less. It's hard to know if the reduction is due to fewer violations, fewer officers available to participate in the campaign, or the officers being less willing to write tickets.
- Audience Comment – Would like to see more enforcement and education in the schools. Safety was once part of the curriculum but isn't anymore. Drivers Ed was a school program but isn't anymore. Schools are packed with things they need to do and teachers are too busy to fit this in the curriculum. "See! Be Seen!" is new campaign. Would like to see more education on Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS). Many people don't like it because it makes noise, but APS is



now a federal mandate. There is not a lot of awareness among people about needs of disabled people and the design of intersection technology to accommodate those needs.

Audience Question: Is photo enforcement a tool that can be used for red light running?

- Red light cameras are only allowed in certain cities across the state. Drivers don't like them because the ticket is valid every time it is issued. Albany has red light cameras at 22 intersections and these cameras have reduced the number and severity of crashes at these intersections. It is not a revenue generator for the City of Albany. NYC is the only place that it is legal to use speed cameras.
- Lt Pero. – Studies show photo enforcement to be highly effective but it is a political decision. The locations where photo enforcement is allowed are focused on cities of larger size and population density.
- Photo enforcement does have a spillover effect and behaviors improve at intersections without cameras too. For speed enforcement, the data needs to identify how fast vehicles move between destinations on a corridor rather than just a single location.
- Audience Comment – We need to look at pedestrian crossings and see if they still make sense. As land use changes we need to make sure that pedestrian accommodations are still satisfactory. Roundabouts move cars but don't provide for safe pedestrian and bike crossings. We need "traffic timing" to reduce speeding. Careful use of sharrows is also important, use them only where they are safe.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

After the panel question and answer period, the summit attendees were broken into two groups to discuss two typical roadways within the region. A rural road in Rensselaer County and an urban street in Schenectady County were selected. The two roads were chosen because they are representative of roadway character and crash trends throughout the region. The groups discussed the existing conditions of the roadway and then identified potential countermeasures that could improve the safety of the roadway for each type of user (pedestrian, bicyclists, motorist) while identifying potential trade-offs associated with the safety countermeasures.

Rural – Tamarac Road

The group discussed physical conditions on rural Tamarac Road in Brunswick, Rensselaer County which serves approximately 2,500 vehicles per day which is a relatively high volume rural road.

Traffic levels and speed/passing zones

- Tamarac Road is used as a local bypass route to avoid Route 7
- Three different speed zones on a relatively low volume road seem unnecessary.
- The number of passing zones on this roadway seems unnecessary.

Cyclists (What would benefit cyclists?)

- Shoulders (minimum for cyclist is 4 feet, 5 feet or more is more comfortable).



- Rumble strips are not recommended on this road and would not be a good idea because there is no/narrow shoulder right now so bicyclists need all the shoulder they can get.
- This is a locally popular cycling route and there is a bike shop on Route 7 near Tamarac Road. There are many group rides on the road.
- CDTC bike priority network could advocate for more rural roads to be a priority for enhancements.

Pedestrians (What would benefit pedestrians?)

- No pedestrian accommodation on this road even at the southern end which is where the public school campus is and where there are fairly densely settled homes. There is no school campus access from Tamarac Road, only to the bus garage.
- Shoulders would benefit pedestrians by providing a space separate from vehicles.
- Sidewalks and crosswalks near the school and soccer complex would be helpful.
- Cut vegetation back on side of roads.
- Have DPW check that proper signage is in place for the school zone and recreational area.
- Reflective post strips can be placed on the sign posts to make the signs stand out better.
- Perhaps a traffic study should be done at the end of the road where the speed limit increased and the crashes were more prevalent.

Passenger vehicles (What would benefit them?)

- Street lights around school area, recreational fields, and intersections in rural areas to notify drivers that the roadway or land uses character has changed so slow down.
- Provide a roadway safety edge so that if drivers leave the road it can be easily corrected without losing control in the dirt or gravel on the side of the road.
- Make the clear zone on the side of the road wider, but not too wide because the wider the clear zone, the more comfortable it is to drive faster.

Road conditions

- The roadway was resurfaced last year and was previously in really poor condition prior to the resurfacing with an entirely disintegrated shoulder
- County highway department should be involved in the discussions about improvements early, before resurfacing or maintenance projects are completed, so that safety improvements can be made concurrently with maintenance for a more efficient use of funds and planning efforts.

Safety issues

- Passing zones near hills is inappropriate for visibility and is potentially unsafe.
- Close trees and telephone poles near the road are likely impacting crashes.
- Close utility poles and trees also create cost prohibitive issues for widening the shoulder on either side.

Signage and reflectors

- Curves could have more reflectors and signs.



- What about putting reflectors in the roadway? In our climate, plows tear them up so the better option is to have reflective paint-like reflectors recessed in the road, although they are more expensive.
- Have DPW check that proper signage is there for the school zone and recreation area.
 - Reflective post strips can be placed on sign posts to make the sign stand out.

Urban – McClellan Street

The group discussed urban McClellan Street in Schenectady, characterized by a mix of land uses including high density residential, hospital and medical office buildings, high school two blocks away, a few drug stores, the only grocery store in the city limits, and a bar. There are several crossroads and driveways throughout the corridor creating conflict points for all users. On street parking is available and used on both sides of the roadway generally throughout the corridor.

General road conditions/design

- One of the most challenging streets in Schenectady – “very tough.”
- The trees and cars parked on both sides of street calm vehicles, pedestrian conflicts not an issue.
- What about left turn signals on such a wide road? Would that help? Has that been analyzed?

Pedestrians/design

- The addition of curb extensions/bulb outs at the major intersections would slow turning traffic and reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians.
- Add or replace crosswalks at intersections for greater visibility.
- Parking right up to the corner and at driveways reduces sight visibility at intersections so drivers and pedestrians may edge out and into the travel way and get hit.
- Sidewalks exist on both sides of the street so pedestrians do have accommodations.
- Pedestrian crossing signals can give you a false sense of security.
- Pedestrian behavior is a big part of the problem, especially when pedestrians cross diagonally mid-block instead of at intersections and crosswalks.
- Could provide striping for shoulders and the center line. Striping is sometimes kept out of the city environment due to the swerving that goes on around parked cars, cyclists, etc.
- Increase the awareness of drivers to pedestrians through additional signage.
- Street tree canopy in the right place and sized correctly.

Cyclists

- The City of Schenectady considers this road a street of significance for bicyclists.
- Look at implementation of a bike lane which might fit in the existing roadway width.

Speeding and traffic calming

- People drive faster than the average speed despite traffic – probably because it’s wide so if you feel safe to drive faster and can – drivers do.
- More street trees might help calm traffic as a vertical element in the areas where the street trees do not presently exist. There are trees in certain sections of the roadway and you can feel the difference.



- Trees and cars parked on both sides of street calm vehicles.
- Lack of delineation of road lanes can be hazardous and one of the crashes was a head-on collision. The street is wide enough to warrant lane striping.
- Roadway striping is sometimes not implemented due to maintenance considerations.
- Rumble strips in residential areas can cause noise issues and lead to complaints.
- Parking right up to the corner and at driveways is reducing sight visibility at intersections so drivers and pedestrians may edge out into the travel way and get hit.

The summit concluded with Sandy Misiewicz explaining the next steps of the study and an opportunity for attendees to stay involved through an email blast and the project website (www.cdtcmpo.org/safetyplan).