



Regional Safety Action Plan Focus Group Meetings

May 24, 2018 - Discussion Notes

FOCUS GROUP ONE – CDTC CONFERENCE ROOM

CDTC Representatives:

- Sandy Misiewicz
- Chris O'Neill

Consultants:

- Wendy Holsberger, VHB
- Alanna Moran, VHB
- Margaret Irwin, River Street Planning & Development

Participants:

- Bill Chapman, Complete Streets Committee, Niskayuna
- Ken Crandall, New York Bicycling Coalition
- Ray Engel, Albany Traffic Safety
- Aubrey Feldman, Governors Traffic Safety Committee
- Paul Kirwan, Albany Police Department
- Nika Lanier, Alliance for Positive Health
- Ifeachor Potts, Alliance for Positive Health
- Merton Simpson, Albany County Legislature, District 2
- Arlene Way, Arbor Hill Development Corporation

Sandy presented a brief introduction of CDTC and the Regional Safety Plan project. VHB presented a brief power point presentation outlining some of the state and local crash trends and areas of focus for the Regional Safety Plan. The meeting was then opened up for general discussion on the participants' knowledge, understanding, questions, and experiences with safety.

The meeting notes have been divided by topic. Some comments are repeated because they fit under more than one topic.

Distracted drivers – Cell phone use

- There is a lack of data about cell phone use as contributor to crashes. People who get into a crash may not admit to having been using their cellphone.
- First responders and crash reports may be reporting these infractions under general category of "driver inattention."
- Traffic ticket data is difficult to differentiate between who was responsible, who was distracted and what distracted them. This data can be extracted from the cell phone and from the car if investigation/prosecution warrants that.
- District attorneys are not prosecuting tickets for cell phone use, so fewer are written. There is an enforcement disconnect. One cell phone violation is five points on your license. Two citations and you are one point away from suspension.
- Buckle Up NY is the only mandated campaign. 60% of people admit to talking on the phone while driving. Long Island has a diversion program that includes giving out sleeves you can put your phone into that prevent phones from working.



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Data needs (more specificity)

- Crash report forms list many factors for crashes and are not specific about behaviors that drivers and pedestrians are actually doing. Old forms were in place in 2010 and 2011. New data should be more accurate.
- First responders and crash reports may be reporting these infractions under general category of “driver inattention.” (re: cell phone use)
- Traffic ticket data is difficult to differentiate between who was responsible and who was distracted and what distracted them. This data can be extracted from the cell phone and from the car if investigation/prosecution warrants that.
- More data is available in pedestrian Safety Action Plan and (downstate) through Vision Zero.

Vulnerable road users (cyclists, pedestrians, motorcyclists)

Pedestrians

- Pedestrians crossing outside of the crosswalk are vulnerable. In the City of Albany fatalities have been due to distracted pedestrians – on cell phone or listening to music, including people getting off buses talking on the phone and walking into traffic.

Cyclists

- Ken Crandall – *NY Bicycling Coalition/Troy Bike Rescue* - Sandy asked about data on vulnerable users. Ken feels that the “Capital Region is a decade behind in bike infrastructure vs bigger cities upstate. Lots of work to do regarding bus stop design - bus needs to stop and get pedestrians to the curb without forcing bicyclists into the lane.”
- Defensive biking - bike share education program being done with CDTA.

Bus riders

- People exiting busses are vulnerable. Cars are aggressive in trying to get around public busses. Most crashes are a result of the person walking around the bus – not the driver of the vehicle. The pedestrian should not be walking into the roadway. Traffic signals provide better control of both vehicle driver and pedestrian behavior. Albany has been more aggressive than other communities in using campaigns and concentrated enforcement. People need to be educated to use crosswalks correctly and push buttons.

Underserved populations

- Sandy asked the representatives from Alliance who provide transportation to consumers what they are experiencing. They provide transportation to underserved populations to help people access services. Concern that transport did not show up on time (Star bus), inappropriately parked cars affect boarding, and there are other obstacles for people with mobility challenges when accessing transit.

Safety campaigns/education and outreach

- See! Be Seen! Campaign - Central Ave. Corridor Study – used campaign extensively. Pedestrian crashes were frequent especially in locations with increasing volume.
- Buckle Up NY is the only mandated campaign. 60% of people admit to talking on the phone while driving. Long Island has a diversion program that includes giving out sleeves you can put your phone into that prevent phones from working.
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- Traffic circles – Young people are being educated about how to navigate. Older population is unfamiliar. They are here to stay and there will be more as the State grows. How and where does education occur? Navigation systems will help. Need to spearhead education campaign – Sandy commented that this is something that the plan should explore and can make recommendations about. How do you reach people? Maybe presentation at churches? With renewal of licenses – could we offer a package of information? Sandy took a defensive driving course and the instructor could not explain how a roundabout functioned.
- Driver education is not focused enough on vulnerable users. Needs to be better integrated into driver education, driver training, and professional driver training. Uber/Lyft drivers are not trained about pedestrian, bike or motorcycle conflicts.
- Driver licensing exam - half of the questions are about impaired driving. Maybe time to increase the number of questions about distracted driving and vulnerable users.
- Defensive biking - bike share education program being done with CDTA.
- Sandy asked how the project team can reach other people, other groups? Monthly email blasts? Suggestion included to go to Public Housing Authority and meet with existing groups like CANA in Albany (Council of Neighborhood Associations) which meets the first Wednesday of every month.
- Anecdotally, instructors for defensive driving courses can't always explain the correct function of roundabouts

For/within schools

- Programs in elementary schools are very successful – kids will scold parents for doing the wrong thing.
- It's getting harder to get into schools with education data – they don't have time. How do we get schools interested in offering that education? Maybe it could be part of physical education training?
- Niskayuna is working on safe routes planning to schools and parks. Busy roads like Troy Schenectady Road create an island in town because people can't easily or safely cross the road. The town is working to identify high risk areas that need crosswalks and signalization. Also, streets are designed for higher speeds than the posted speed limits.

Speeding

- Alanna - Commented on the power that a peripheral vision demonstration in 5-mile increments was and how narrow your vision becomes the faster you go.
- Sandy noted that it is expected in this area that people drive above the speed limit. Other areas around the country are not like that.

Interchanges and toll booths

- Ray Engel - *Albany County Traffic Safety Board* - Concern that volume of thruway traffic going through interchanges is extremely high – holiday weekends experience 200,000 vehicles through exit 24. If the Thruway goes “toll booth free” by 2022 what will the impact be? The toll booths slow and control traffic. Will all toll booths and interchanges be treated the same way? Will the toll booth infrastructure remain? What will this mean for behavior through the big curve at exit 24? Tractor trailers?



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Traffic redirection during crashes/weather

- Traffic Safety Board started to share information and resources as a way of communicating about crashes or bad weather and how to handle traffic. Moving traffic off the interstate creates other conflicts on local roads like how to deal with tandem trailers. For example, proactive highway closings (especially with snow) lets trucking companies plan ahead and keep their trucks moving, but can move the trucks to local roads.

Enforcement and penalties

- Penalties need to be higher in work zones and school zones. There needs to be better enforcement – beyond doubling fines.
- District attorneys are not prosecuting tickets for cell phone use, so fewer are written. There is an enforcement disconnect. One cell phone violation is five points on your license. Two citations and you are one point away from suspension.
- Sandy – Would it work for some enforcement penalties to be local laws? Group felt they need to be State law. Perhaps we could let law enforcement automatically suspend license for 15 or 30 days. These are “larger than regional issues” and will be listed in the report. Are there examples of counties taking responsibility for enforcement?
- Albany County initiated an Aggressive driving campaign but the judiciary does not take the tickets seriously. Albany wrote thousands of tickets that are getting adjourned in contemplation of dismissal. Police can’t intervene with the judges. The County Attorneys must approach judges. Their biggest issues are people speeding and running red lights.
- Comment that people would not dream of driving without a seatbelt or on the phone in New York City and enforcement is aggressive. It was noted that NYC has its own vehicle and safety code which influences why they can be more proactive.

Traffic calming measures

- Madison Avenue traffic calming is really having a significant impact on safety – keeps speeds manageable.

Social toll of crashes

- Merton - Described his family experience with serious crashes. Sandy remarked that safety is an issue that affects everyone.