

ROAD SAFETY ASSESSMENT - COULD IT HELP MAIN ST. MALONE?

For years Malone residents have discussed how to “take back” their Main St., which happens to be US Route 11, connecting Rouses Point, NY with New Orleans, Louisiana. Route 11 in the Village of Malone (Main St.) is primarily a four-lane highway, maintained by the NYS DOT, running through the middle of the Village of 6,000 people. Because it is a main route across upstate New York near the Canadian border, it is busy – the third busiest highway in the five-county region from Lowville to Plattsburgh. The annual average daily traffic, the nationally recognized method of comparing traffic along our streets, roads, and highways, is approximately 26,000 vehicles per day, a significant percentage of which is large truck traffic. Only Cornelia St. (Route 3) in Plattsburgh and Arsenal St. (also Route 3) in Watertown are busier highways.

A road safety assessment could be a possible solution to address the local perception that Main St. is a liability for the Village. The main complaints from residents are that traffic speeds, is noisy, and deters shopping and commercial development along the downtown corridor. Some of this is perception, but some is also reality. The problem may seem simple but often different perspectives, opinions, and concerns reveal the answer to be more complex than we might have thought.

A road safety assessment should include things like an on-site visit to the area of concern for direct observation, and a community meeting involving all stakeholders where a dialogue could take place. The site visit should involve an active investigation of the street or road in question, with participants walking along the area of concern, making observations and discussing problem sites. Residents should have a chance to point out their concerns and experiences from their unique vantage point as citizens who live in, work in, or frequent the area.

Following the site visit, a sit-down meeting would normally take place between the parties involved. During the meeting, important facts and statistics from local law enforcement and the highway department are shared. This discussion would include the pros and cons of different engineering solutions and the overall aspects of addressing safety, including traffic calming ideas, speed humps, additional signage, chicanes, bulb outs, narrowing up the road, and work at the intersections.

Law enforcement and other local government officials are usually able to provide additional information in the form of traffic counts, speed studies, law infractions, crash data and other relevant information.

Assistance in performing a road safety assessment may be sought from various agencies such as NYS DOT, Cornell Local Roads Program, our local county Traffic Safety Board, local and state police agencies, and others.

A road safety assessment is no guarantee that changes will be made, or, if they are, that the changes will make everything perfect. But, it is a tool that could be helpful, if not in making major changes, at least in giving local citizens a better perspective of the complex job of moving traffic safely while making our communities more pleasing.

Thanks go to Adam Howell, communication specialist at Cornell Local Roads Program, for information presented in this article.