Federal Highway Administration
The FHWA’s Safety Program has an enormous amount of information on all facets of traffic safety:

www.safety.fhwa.dot.gov

Some FHWA key sites:
- Intersection Safety: http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/intersection/
- Pedestrian & Bicycle Road Safety Audits: http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/rsa/ped_bike/tools_solve

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
http://www.nhtsa.gov/

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration
The FMCSA has information on programs like Share the Road and Highway-Rail Grade Crossing safety:

New York State Department of Transportation
The NYSDOT has a comprehensive list of safety resources:

https://www.dot.ny.gov/safety

- The Strategic Highway Safety Plan is found at https://www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/operating/oss/safety/security.htm

New York State Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations
http://www.nysmpos.org/

Getting Involved
Traffic crashes cause loss of life, serious injury, and economic loss. In New York, 1,169 people lost their lives in crashes in 2011, and over 11,000 were seriously injured, as reported by NHTSA. According to a study done by AAA in 2011, the total cost of these crashes is nearly $300 billion annually.

That is more than three times the estimated cost of traffic congestion, but for a long time addressing urban congestion has been seen as a more pressing problem by policy makers. State and local transportation agencies have still regularly invested in safety improvements; that has always been a priority of transportation engineers. More recently, as congestion has stabilized or even decreased in many areas, traffic safety has become a high priority.

There are a number of agencies within the U.S. Department of Transportation that deal with safety. Principal among them are the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which addresses roadway safety; the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which addresses vehicle safety and human behavior; and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, which addresses commercial vehicle operations. In New York State, the NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and the Governor’s Traffic Safety Committee (GTSC) have primary responsibility for transportation safety programs and projects.
SAFETEA-LU, the 2005 federal transportation bill, created requirements for a rational approach to transportation safety planning and investment. FHWA requires states to develop a Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP). NHTSA requires a Highway Safety Plan (HSP).

The FHWA defines the SHSP as “A statewide coordinated safety plan that provides a comprehensive framework for reducing highway fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads. The SHSP strategically establishes statewide goals, objectives, and key emphasis areas developed in consultation with Federal, State, local, and private sector safety stakeholders.” The key concept is strategic. That means that a State DOT, working with its partners to develop or update the SHSP, can focus safety resources on its most serious problem areas. One state may have a problem with lane departure crashes, another with over-representation of older drivers, and a third with alcohol-related pedestrian fatalities. The FHWA lets them use a data-driven process to attack the problems most important to them. States choose from a list of emphasis areas that make the most sense for them and their available resources.

The NHTSA 402 program requires that the Governor’s Traffic Safety Committee develop a Highway Safety Plan (called the Highway Safety Strategic Plan, or HSSP, in New York). The Plan is to address “activities in support of national highway safety goals, including national law enforcement mobilizations; sustained enforcement of statutes addressing impaired driving, national law enforcement mobilizations; sustained enforcement of statutes addressing impaired driving, and enforcement of safety and their available resources.

The current New York State Strategic Highway Safety Plan was adopted in March 2010. The Plan makes it clear that partnerships are a key to improving safety. “Strategically partnered with the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organizations (MPOs), Authorities, local transportation agencies, enforcement agencies, community groups and advocates are vital if the state is to realize efficiencies in using limited resources for pedestrian, bicycle, driver, vehicle and roadway safety improvements.” The SHSP as an umbrella safety plan for New York, pulling together elements of plans that address commercial vehicles, crash records, and driver behavior. All these plans share the goals of reducing vehicle crash fatalities and crash rates. New York’s 2010 SHSP focuses on the following seven emphasis areas:

- Driver Behavior [impaired drivers, speeding and aggressive driving, occupant protection]
- Pedestrians [and bicyclists]
- Large Trucks
- Motorcycles
- 5 Highways [improve data analysis tools; improve intersection design and operations; address lane departure crashes; address work zone safety]
- 6 Emergency Medical Services [improve data collection; improve coverage of traffic safety in EMT training; improve communication on road conditions to emergency responders; address responder crash prevention]
- 7 Traffic Safety Information Systems

Each Emphasis Area has a series of strategies designed to meet the stated objectives, and performance measures to gauge progress.

NYSDOT’S STRATEGIC HIGHWAY SAFETY PLAN (SHSP)

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1. Impaired Driving [improve awareness and enforcement]
2. Police Traffic Services [focus on speeding, aggressive driving, distracted driving and all other traffic safety vehicle and traffic laws]
3. Motorcycles [support motorcycle driver training, education and enforcement programs]
4. Non-Motorized modes [focus on education, Safe Routes to School, Share the Road, Pedestrian and Bicycle safety]
5. Occupant Protection [public awareness campaigns, child seat installation, seat belt enforcement and education]
6. Traffic Records [improve traffic record information systems]
7. Community Traffic Safety Programs [focus on teen and older driver population in addition to underserved populations]

GTSC’s work is done both at the state level and through County Traffic Safety Boards. Much of it centers on public education campaigns and support of law enforcement efforts.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

While the SHSP is prepared by NYSDOT, and the HSSP by the Governor’s Traffic Safety Committee, achieving the goals and objectives of these plans is not solely a State responsibility. There is a great deal that cities, villages, and towns can do to address critical safety concerns on their streets and help reduce deaths and injuries.

One way to get started is to talk to your Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). These transportation planning agencies have access to crash data, sometimes have GIS applications to map high-crash locations, and can also explain the availability of Federal transportation funds for specific safety purposes.

Finally, they may be able to offer expertise in analyzing safety problems, including conducting Road Safety Assessments.

HERE ARE SOME ACTIONS YOU CAN CONSIDER:

- Engineering: Creating Safer Transportation Environments. The SHSP includes six emphasis areas as particularly hazardous due to conflicting movements of vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists, especially in the presence of bus stops, loading zones, and on-street parking. For intersections under your jurisdiction, you first need to analyze police crash reports to better understand the safety problem. If you do not have local police agency reports, your MPO or NYSDOT Regional office can help you obtain them. An engineering analysis will identify crash patterns that may be corrected. Field observations will also help clarify the issues. Where pedestrian safety is identified as a problem, a Walkability Audit may prove helpful. Once the analysis is complete, there are a number of actions you can take that respond to specific problems. FHWA recently issued a “Guidance Memorandum on Promoting the Implementation of Proven Safety Countermeasures” that is particularly helpful in creating solutions.

- Traffic signal improvements. Optimizing signal timing can reduce delay and the driver frustration that can lead to red light running. A leading pedestrian interval and limiting right turn on red lets pedestrians start crossing before cars turn across the crosswalk. Pedestrian countdown signals help people decide when they can cross the street. Accessible pedestrian signals speak to visually impaired pedestrians. More detailed information is available in the NYSDOT Fact Sheet “Designing a Traffic Signal to Accommodate Pedestrians” at www.nysdor.org

- Intersection design. Roundabouts require a significant investment, but the potential for a near elimination of severe crashes: 90% reduction in fatalities and 76% reduction in injuries, accord- ing to FHWA. Less costly are installation of turn lanes (where warranted) and curb extensions that reduce pedestrian crossing distances.

- Complete Streets. Design to make our streets safer for all users (see the NYSDOY Complete Streets Factsheet at www.nysdor.org).

- Safer Work Zones. The SHSP identifies work zone safety as a problem both for highway workers and motorists. While work zones for major construction projects go through a thorough design process, the SHSP notes that maintenance work zones result in numerous fatalities. Your road maintenance crews should be trained on deploying work zones that comply with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), and provided with the materials they need to create a safe work environment. The FHWA also encourages planning construction projects to minimize lane closures. Simple pocket guides are available from the Cornell Local Roads Program.

- Focused Law Enforcement. GTSC and local Traffic Safety Boards support focused enforcement campaigns that address specific traffic safety problems, ranging from seat belt use to impaired driving to cell phone use. You can work with your local police agencies to participate in these campaigns or start your own to address local issues. It is also helpful for local agencies to file their crash reports through TRAC, the online Traffic and Criminal Software operated by the New York State Police. This leads to better crash data and more focused safety solutions.

- Public Education. The biggest factor in traffic fatalities and serious injuries is human behavior. Crashes happen when people drive aggressively, speed, unbelted, drowsy, distracted or impaired by alcohol or drugs. It is the responsibility of all agencies to educate people about the dangers of hazardous behavior. Changing behavior takes time, but after many years New York now exceeds 90% seat belt usage. Your city, village, or town can join the efforts of GTSC, NYSDOT, the NY State Police and others to emphasize safe driving, cycling and walking to your residents and visitors. These range from “Click it or Ticket” campaigns to portable radar speed boards to bicycle rodeos to texting and Driving Don’t Mix” messages for teens. The GTSC and your County Traffic Safety Board have many education resources.

- Travel lane departures. The SHSP includes an objective to reduce lane departure crashes on rural and suburban roads. Consider better lane delineation and pavement markings, cleaning up clear zones, and redesigning problem curves.

- EFES OF TRAFFIC SAFETY

- Engineering: Safety conscious design and operation of our transportation systems will make them safer.
- Enforcement: Aggressive enforcement of traffic laws lets drivers know we’re serious about safety.
- Education: It is imperative to teach everyone about how they can contribute to improving traffic safety through their own behavior.
- Emergency Response: Surviving a crash can often depend on the quality and timeliness of EMS, fire/rescue, and police response.

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