

Pedestrian Safety Awareness

By Jessica Ridgeway, Planner

For most people, transportation is essential to meet daily needs. We all have different preferences when it comes to getting around, but at one time or another, everyone is a pedestrian. In 2018, 3.7% of workers walked as their primary means of transportation, with another 5.4% relying on access to transit to get to work¹. That accounts for over 10,000 commuters that walk or partially walk to work each day in Orange County. Many more who cannot afford a car or have physical, medical, or mental conditions that limit their ability to operate a vehicle often rely on walking as a primary form of transportation. In Orange County, approximately 1 in 4 households have access to one or less vehicles and 5% of households have no access to a vehicle². Walking offers an affordable form of transportation that is critical to accessing food and recreational opportunities, getting to school and work, visiting friends and family, and reaching essential health care and government services.

Benefits of being a Pedestrian

There are many physical, mental, and community benefits to walking, too. The US Surgeon General produced a Call to Action called “Step it Up!” to promote walking and walkable communities, recommending walking as a key public health strategy. Doctors prescribe walking to prevent several diseases from cancer to heart disease to diabetes. Accessible, comfortable, and convenient pedestrian infrastructure produces opportunity for human interaction which strengthens relationships and contributes to a sense of community identity and place. Pedestrian activity is also often considered an indicator of a community’s livability, a factor that attracts potential residents, new businesses, employment opportunities, and tourism.

Dangers of being a Pedestrian

According to Smart Growth America (SGA), in the past decade, the number of people struck and killed while walking increased by 35%. Between 2008

and 2017, drivers struck and killed 49,340 people who were walking on streets across the United States. Here in New York State, pedestrians comprise more than 25% of the fatalities due to motor vehicle crashes (including NYC)³. Dangerous by Design, a report released by SGA found people over the age of 50, people of color, and those walking in communities with lower median household incomes are stuck and killed by drivers at much higher rates than other race, age and income groups. Pedestrians are 1.5 times more likely than passenger vehicle occupants to be killed in a car crash on each trip.

It takes the commitment and involvement all road users to create places that are safe and friendly for walking. The Planning Department compiled a list of resources (below) and Safety Tips for anyone looking for ways to improve the safety and comfort of their community’s streets by learning about issues that affect pedestrian conditions, finding ways to address and prevent these problems, and promote safety for all road users.⁴

Resources

Community Members:

- [New York State Vehicle & Traffic Law](#)
- [A Kid’s Guide to Safe Walking](#)
- [Stepping Out as an Older Adult](#)
- [America Walks Fact Sheets](#)
- [Walkability Checklist – English | Spanish](#)

Municipal Officials and Community Leaders:

- [How to Develop a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan](#)
- [Proven Safety Countermeasures](#)
- [Safe Transportation for Every Pedestrian \(STEP\)](#)

1. ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates, Table: S0801

2. ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates, Table: S0804

3. <https://www.ny.gov/sites/ny.gov/files/atoms/files/pedestriansafetyactionplan.pdf>

4. Beck, LF; Delinger, AM; O’Meil, ME. Motor vehicle crash injury rates by mode of travel, United States: Using exposure-based methods to quantify differences. American Journal of Epidemiology. 2017. 166, 212-218.



Safety Tips

Drivers

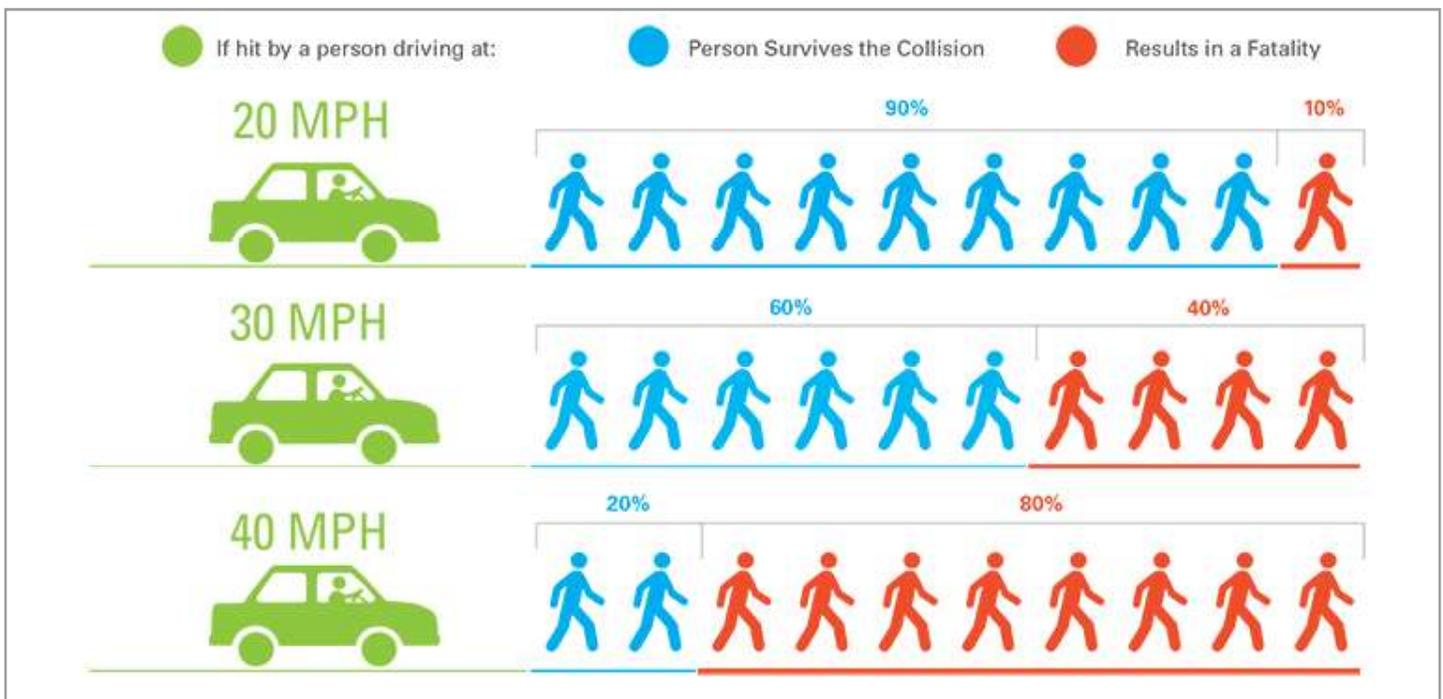
Don't drive distracted. Over the past decade, distracted driving has become one of the leading causes of vehicle crashes on our nation's roads. Researchers at the Governor's Highway Safety Association report that sending or receiving an average text takes a driver's eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds, the equivalent of driving blindfolded at 55-mph for the length of an entire football field! When you get behind the wheel, put away your phone. No one is able to interact with other road users safely while distracted.

Drive the speed limit. Following the speed limit isn't just the law — it is a critical component to keeping pedestrians safe. Driving at the posted speed limit gives driver time to see, identify, and react in time to brake. Even if you are going 35 mph in a 20 mph zone, it increases your vehicle's stopping distance by more than 100 feet. In those few seconds, your vehicle will travel the length of a basketball court, and it could be too late to avoid hitting the pedestrian in front of you.

Be extra cautious in school zones and around school buses. When entering or exiting the school bus, children become pedestrians who must safely navigate

the school bus danger zones which are areas 10 feet in front, behind, and on each side of the bus. A national survey conducted by the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services found that in 2019, more than 95,000 motorists ran school bus stop arms in one day.

- When driving in neighborhoods with school zones, slow down and watch out for children walking or bicycling to school, especially if there are no sidewalks in neighborhood.
- Learn and obey the school bus laws in your state. Learn the "flashing signal light system" that school bus drivers use to alert motorists of pending actions:
 - ◇ Yellow flashing lights indicate that the bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children. Motorists should slow down and prepare to stop their vehicles.
 - ◇ Red flashing lights and extended stop arms indicate that the bus has stopped, and that children are getting on or off. Motorists must stop their cars and wait until the red lights stop flashing, the extended stop sign is withdrawn, and the bus begins moving before they can start driving again.



Graphic: Vision Zero San Francisco (<https://view.joomag.com/vision-zero-san-francisco/0685197001423594455?short>)

Pedestrians

Be predictable. Follow the rules of the road: obey all traffic signals, signs and pavement markings when you are crossing a street. Follow pedestrian signals when they are present:

- Walking person/Walk: Check for traffic and turning vehicles; begin crossing.
- Flashing Red Hand/Don't Walk: If you are already in the street, finish crossing. If you have not started crossing, wait for the next Walk.
- Steady Red Hand/Don't Walk: Do not start to cross. Wait for the next Walk.

For more information about rights and laws for pedestrians in New York State, visit: <http://www.safeny.ny.gov/peds-vt.htm>.

Be visible. Lighting and visibility are key factors in traffic safety for all road users, especially pedestrians. In 2017, 75% of crashes that resulted in pedestrian fatalities in the US occurred in dark conditions⁵. Be visible at all times. Wear bright clothing during the day and wear reflective materials or use a flashlight at night. See and Be Seen! Never assume a driver sees you. Make eye contact with drivers as they approach to make sure you are seen.



Left: Image of a group crossing Lake Street in the City of Newburgh before safety measures were implemented. Above: Image of the same intersection at Lake Street after a crosswalk and bump-outs were temporarily painted on the roadway to increase pedestrian safety.



Cross at intersections. Fewer pedestrian fatalities occurred at intersections (18%), where drivers expect pedestrians, than occurred elsewhere on the street (73%)⁶. Whenever possible, cross streets at crosswalks or intersections, where drivers expect pedestrians. Look for cars in all directions, including those turning left or right. If a crosswalk or intersection is not available, locate a well-lit area where you have the best view of traffic. At mid-block locations, if there is not a crosswalk, sign, or signal, you must yield the right-of-way to all vehicles on the roadway. Wait for a gap in traffic that allows enough time to cross safely; continue watching for traffic as you cross.

Walk on sidewalks whenever they are available. In 2017, 26% of pedestrian fatalities occurred from 6 to 8:59 p.m.⁷. Use sidewalks where they are provided and safe to use. When there are no sidewalks, walk on the left side of the roadway or shoulder (stay as far to the left as possible), facing traffic.

5. National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2019, May). Speeding: 2017 data (Traffic Safety Facts. DOT HS 812 687). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

6. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812681> Note: "At Intersection" and "Not at Intersection" do not include those in the "Other". Percentage values may not add up to 100% due to independent rounding.

7. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812681>

