

# Why Local Public Works Departments Should Champion a Local Road Safety Plan

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Local public works departments serve as the backbone of our communities' infrastructure. Taking the lead on a Local Road Safety Plan (LRSP) is not just a proactive safety strategy; it's a forward-thinking move that builds public trust, improves transparency, and lays the groundwork for safer roadways for all users.

We were thrilled to host our first Local Road Safety Planning workshop in Portsmouth last August and extend our sincere thanks Amanda Zatecka from the NHDOT Safety and Active Transportation team as well as the attending communities for expressing interest in this important work: **Londonderry, Portsmouth, Wakefield, Hanover, Goffstown, Hampton, Concord**, and the **Central NH Regional Planning Commission**. Your participation shows strong leadership in prioritizing roadway safety.

As one participant shared, the session was *"very educational and helpful in getting resources for local road safety."* Another noted that it *"got people thinking of areas to address in town or implement safety measures."* These reactions reflect exactly why every New Hampshire community can benefit from a Local Road Safety Plan.

## A Clear, Transparent Framework for Funding and Safety

One of the most compelling reasons to develop an LRSP is the transparency it brings to funding and roadway safety prioritization. Rather than reacting after a severe crash occurs or making ad hoc improvements, an LRSP lays out a defensible, data-driven roadmap. This enables communities to justify decisions, align safety improvements with proven countermeasures, and build public confidence that roadway funds are being spent strategically to promote safety for all its road users.

## Systemic Thinking: Not Just Where, But *Why* Crashes Happen

An LRSP is not only about identifying isolated crash hotspots. It's also about understanding the patterns behind crashes—especially in our rural areas, where repeat crash locations are rare but repeat crash *types* are common. What do I mean? According to NH's latest Strategic Highway Safety Plan, **70% of New Hampshire's roadway fatalities involve a roadway departure**. Expand that consideration to national statistics that over 75% of Rural Roadway Departure deaths are due to three crash types: **roadway departure crashes on curves, intersection crashes, or collisions with fixed objects**. These are predictable crash types, often times with roadway characteristics that may contribute to the likelihood of these crashes occurring. By addressing those "types" of roadway areas, we may be able to more proactively protect people from serious injuries or crashes.

With systemic analysis, public works departments can proactively identify locations with those characteristics and apply targeted countermeasures—better curve signage, enhanced striping, traffic calming, pedestrian visibility upgrades, and more. This approach reduces severe crashes *before* they happen and saves costs down the line

## A Community-Driven Process That Builds Buy-In

Effective safety planning doesn't happen in a vacuum. An LRSP encourages collaboration across departments—emergency services, law enforcement, planning, public health, and elected officials—as well as meaningful community involvement. When stakeholders are part of the process from the beginning, the resulting decisions are more trusted, the rationale for improvements is clearer, and implementation is smoother.

Stakeholder engagement also strengthens accountability. With data to support decisions and a documented plan, departments can point to the reasoning behind each action—helping to depoliticize safety decisions and keep the focus on saving lives.



## Start Where You Are—It's Scalable

Every community can begin an LRSP, regardless of size, staffing, or data availability. You don't need a history of crashes or a complex network of roads to get started. An LRSP is scalable, meaning you can begin with small goals and build over time.

For example, some towns may start with simple crash diagramming or enforcement data analysis, while others might integrate more complex crash reconstruction or stakeholder workshops. There's no "one-size-fits-all" model, which is part of what makes LRSPs so adaptable and effective for local governments.

## Resources and Support Are Readily Available

You don't have to figure it out alone. In fact, you *can't* do it alone with a Local Road Safety Plan. You need stakeholders and partners, and you'll have plenty of resources to help you too. A range of support is available from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), and your NH LTAP center- us at UNH T2! Our recent workshop highlighted tools, templates, and guidance that make getting started easier than ever. We're here to help municipalities access those resources and move forward with confidence.

## Looking Ahead

Whether you're in a city or a small rural town, leading the way on local road safety can make a lasting difference. A Local Road Safety Plan not only protects your residents—it also strengthens decision-making, supports long-term infrastructure goals, and reinforces your department's leadership in building safer, smarter communities.

Now is the time to start.

<https://linktr.ee/LocalRoadSafety>

<https://t2.unh.edu/resources>