

AARP New York

Complete Streets Week: Streets & Sidewalks Survey Results



This past spring, AARP New York launched a week-long, statewide initiative called “Complete Streets Week: Making New York Walkable for All Generations,” to survey intersections, crosswalks, and sidewalks, and shed light on the dangers pedestrians face as they walk on their streets. AARP volunteers partnered with local community organizations to survey 530 intersections, crosswalks, and sidewalks across New York City and more than 30 counties throughout the state to determine how safe they were for pedestrians.¹ These survey results reveal significant gaps in the state’s pedestrian infrastructure and point to an urgent need to design roadways to be more safe and accessible to pedestrians of all ages.

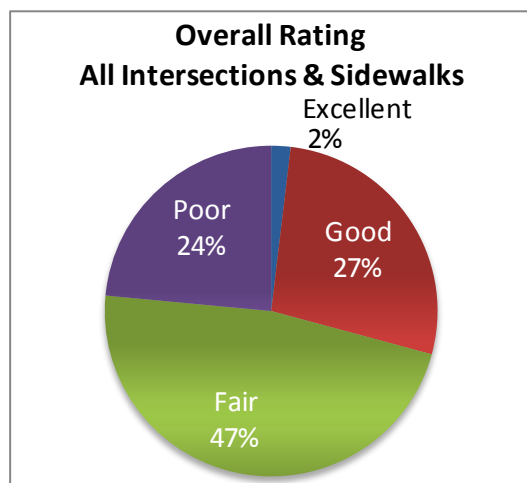
Each intersection, crosswalk, and sidewalk was evaluated by an AARP volunteer or a partnering community group using an AARP survey that was designed by members of the Institute of Transportation Engineers and AARP (survey attached). The survey was designed to assess more than 60 factors ranging from the condition of infrastructure to the behavior of drivers and pedestrians. This review of the survey findings highlights some of the more alarming results found statewide by the volunteers, and also breaks down the results of the surveys conducted in New York City separately.

Briefly, the volunteers found:

- Push-to-walk crossing signals were often not functioning or lacking altogether
- Crosswalks are often missing or poorly marked
- Handicap accessible ramps are frequently missing or improperly installed
- Crossing times are often too short
- Sidewalks are frequently cracked or broken and often blocked by traffic signs or other obstacles
- Dangerous driver behavior including speeding, failing to yield, and failing to obey traffic signals presents a threat to pedestrians

Findings

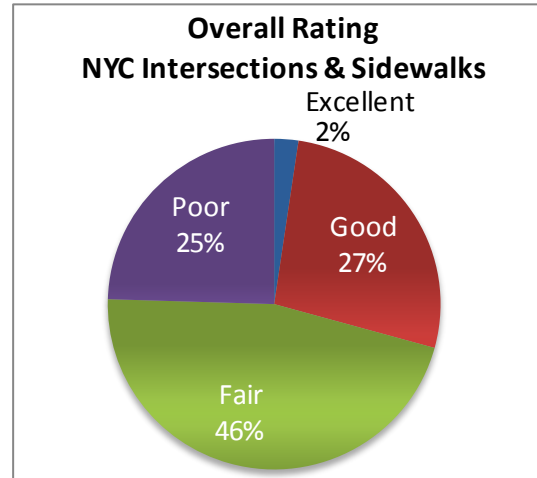
Overall, the volunteers found just seven locations to be in excellent condition. One hundred and three received a good rating. By far the biggest chunk – 180 locations, accounting for 47 percent of those evaluated – were rated in fair condition. But 93 intersections, crosswalks, and sidewalks were rated in poor condition. New York City intersections, crosswalks, and sidewalks were rated with approximately the same share of excellent, good, fair, and poor locations. (Volunteers did not rate each location on every factor. Nevertheless, sample sizes, indicated by “N”, were still large enough to draw valid conclusions.)



N = 383; 144 locations were not rated.

¹ The counties surveyed were: Albany, Bronx, Broome, Chemung, Clinton, Columbia, Dutchess, Erie, Fulton, Genessee, Kings, Livingston, Monroe, Nassau, New York, Oneida, Onondaga, Ontario, Orange, Otsego, Queens, Richmond, Rockland, Saratoga, Schenectady, Stueben, Suffolk, Sullivan, Tompkins, Ulster, Warren, and Westchester.

More specifically, the results found widespread problems with the condition of basic pedestrian infrastructure and with driver behavior. At 192 intersections, a push-to-walk crosswalk signal was either not available or not functioning. Missing or poorly marked crosswalks were found at 227 intersections. One hundred and twenty five intersections had misplaced ramps or lacked them altogether. At 115 intersections where handicap accessible ramps were in place, they often were not properly installed, lacking texture or other markings that make it possible for pedestrians with visual impairments to identify them. Traffic signs, telephone poles, shrubs, newspaper boxes, and other nuisances blocked sidewalks at 80 of the intersections evaluated, making it difficult to walk, particularly for people pushing baby strollers, using a wheelchair, personal mobility device, or with visual impairments.



N = 212; 41 locations were not rated.

Much attention has recently been paid to the short duration of crossing signals. The New York City Department of Transportation has responded to those complaints by promising to install countdown crossing signals at 1,500 intersections citywide. Indeed, the volunteers found that crossing times at 191 intersections were too short even for the average walker.

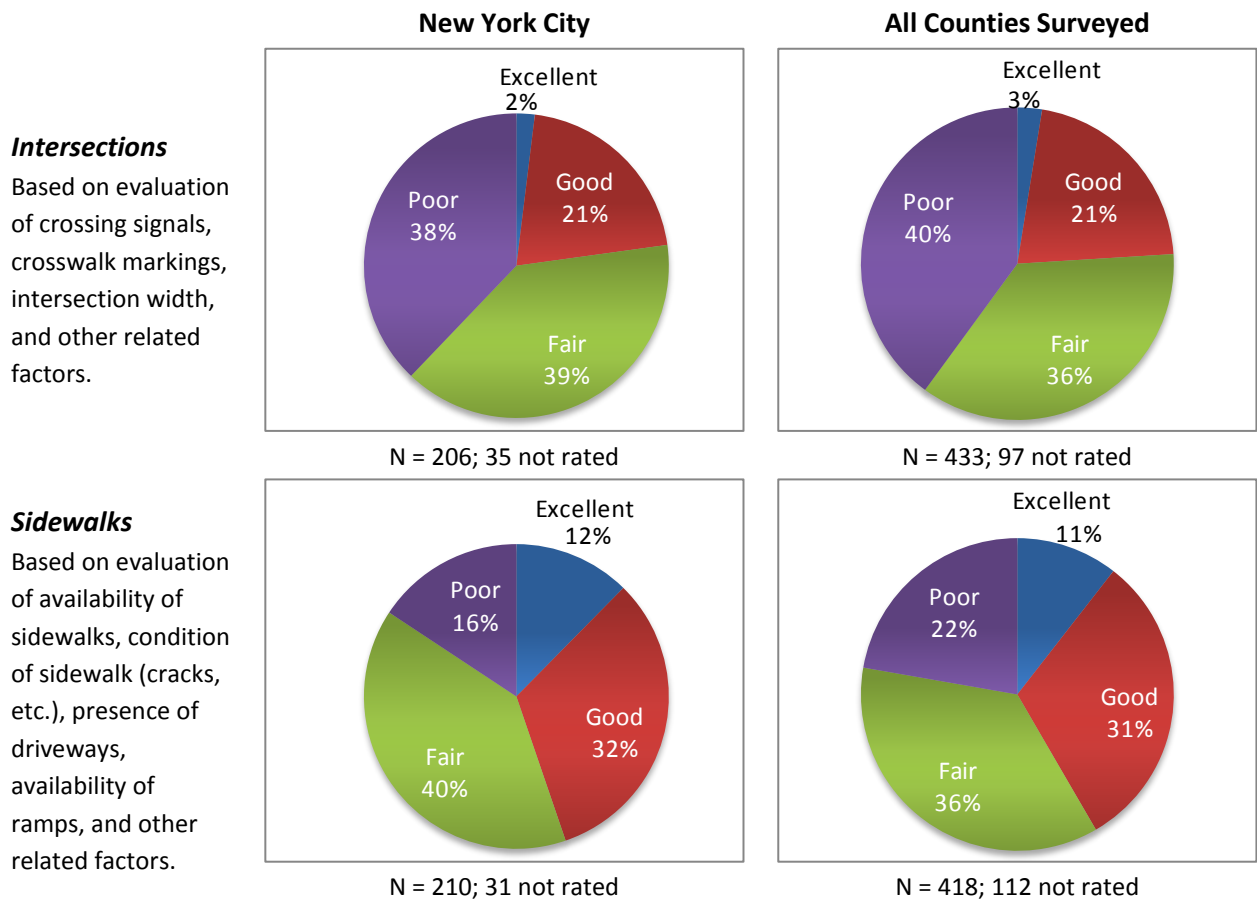
Beyond basic infrastructure, the volunteers identified problems with unclear signage at 119 intersections. Bus stops without adequate shelter were noted at 128 intersections, and those without adequate lighting (a personal safety risk) were found at 60 intersections.

Dangerous driver behavior presents a constant threat to pedestrians. The survey results found drivers not obeying traffic signals, perhaps the most dangerous violation, at 121 intersections. At 193 intersections, drivers failed to stop behind the crosswalk, encroaching on pedestrians' safe zone. Even more worrisome, at 221 intersections, drivers failed to yield to pedestrians altogether.

	NYC	Upstate	All
Push-to-walk signal not available / not working	111	81	192
Ped signal doesn't give average walker enough time to cross	101	90	191
Crosswalk not or poorly marked	94	133	227
Sidewalk broken or cracked	111	104	215
No or misplaced ramps for wheelchairs, strollers, etc.	50	75	125
Curb cuts are not textured or marked for visually impaired	53	62	115
Sidewalk blocked with poles, signs, shrubs, etc.	29	51	80
Drivers do not obey traffic signals	63	58	121
Drivers do not yield to pedestrians	123	98	221
Drivers do not stop behind crosswalk	109	84	193
	NYC	Upstate	All

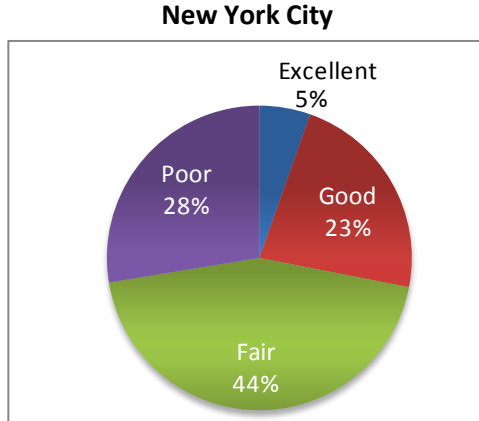
Unclear signs	56	63	119
Bus stop doesn't have shelter	72	56	128
Bus stop doesn't have adequate lighting	30	30	60
Total locations surveyed	241	289	530

The charts below show the overall ratings for the more than 30 counties surveyed and, separately, for New York City intersections, crosswalks, and sidewalks, on the full range of factors evaluated. Both across the state and in New York City, intersections (evaluated based on the availability and condition of crosswalks, crossing signals, intersection widths, and other related factors) scored the poorest overall rating. On the other end of the spectrum, comfort and appeal (evaluated based on the presence or absence of street trees, bus shelters, benches, graffiti, and litter) received the best rating.

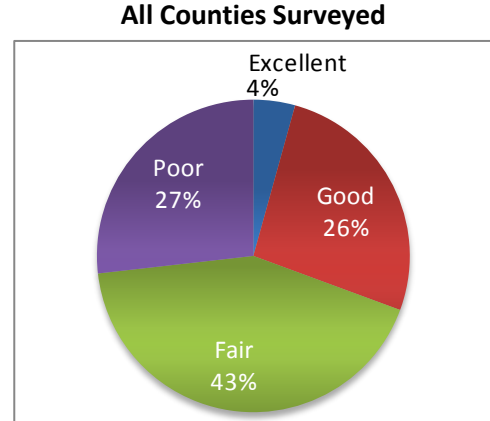


Driver Behavior

Based on evaluation of driver behavior including obeying traffic signs and signals, speeding, yielding to pedestrians, and other related factors.



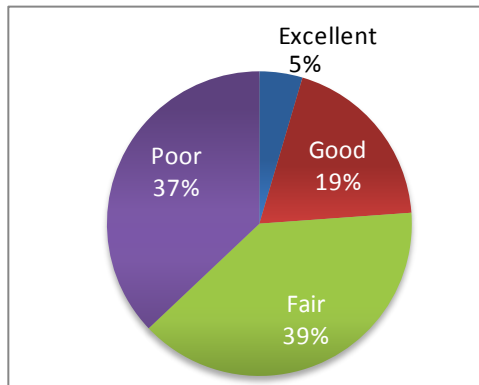
N = 203; 38 not rated



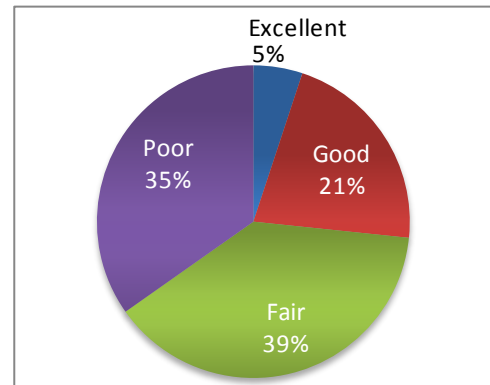
N = 418; 112 not rated

Safety

Based on evaluation of factors contributing to pedestrians' sense of safety including speeding traffic, distracted drivers, criminal activity, unleashed dogs, and unclear signs.



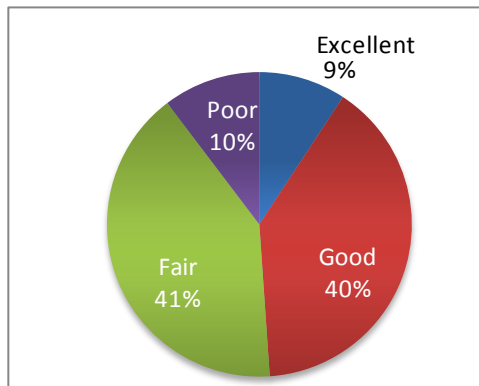
N = 197; 44 not rated



N = 394; 136 not rated

Comfort and Appeal

Based on evaluation of streetscape amenities including street trees, bus shelters, and benches, and the presence of graffiti, and litter.



N = 184; 57 not rated



N = 357; 173 not rated

Conclusion

Municipalities across New York state are beginning to recognize the need to improve pedestrian infrastructure, adopting new policies to ensure that pedestrians are taken into account when new roads are built or existing roads reconstructed. Already, more than half a dozen municipalities, including Babylon, Islip, Buffalo, Binghamton, Erie County, and Ulster County, have passed Complete Streets policies or resolutions with several more planning to adopt policies in the near future.

Clearly, it is time for New York state to move beyond this piecemeal, community-by-community approach and create a uniform statewide policy. The findings of AARP's survey show that New York's intersections, sidewalks, crosswalks, and intersections still have a long way to go before they can be considered safe and accessible for pedestrians.

Recently, the New York State Senate made significant progress toward creating a uniform policy for road design by passing with overwhelming bipartisan support Complete Streets legislation by a vote of 57-4 on June 17, 2010. Unfortunately, the New York State Assembly failed to pass this bill.

The Complete Streets bill (A8587-B/SB5711-B) requires certain pedestrian accommodations to be considered in the planning of roads and it offers an exemption if the municipality or the State contends that the cost is disproportionate to the need now or in the future. The recommendations include such simple solutions as crosswalks, lane striping, curb cuts, sidewalks, and timed crossing signals.

AARP believes that there is a need to seriously address the alarming numbers found in these surveys and start building roads and streets that enable safe access for all generations. Safe and accessible roadways and sidewalks are a critical link in our transportation system and are vitally important to helping New Yorkers access essential community services while living in their communities with control and choice.