

DID YOU KNOW???

TRAFFIC COUNTS – HOW BUSY IS YOUR HIGHWAY?

All that traffic! Have you ever wondered just how much traffic there is on our highways? Are counts really increasing? How do they measure traffic volumes?

NYS DOT counts traffic not only on state highways but also on county and town roads and on some village streets – not every year, but periodically.

For consistency, traffic counts are measured in “Average Annual Daily Traffic” (AADT). The numbers for any given location are the average number of vehicles that use that particular location every day of the year. Because the number of vehicles varies from day to day, season to season, and other variables, DOT uses multipliers that take into account when the traffic counts were obtained and converts the data into AADT numbers.

Although there are some locations equipped with permanent traffic counting equipment, most of the counts are taken over a short period ranging from a couple of days to a couple of weeks. You can tell when the counts are being taken by the rubber hoses that cross the road.

To obtain the AADT numbers for some of our area roads, I contacted Brian Staie from the NYS DOT for his assistance. In the table accompanying this article are some traffic counts in Franklin County. You can see that the busiest location is on Main St. in downtown Malone, with an AADT of 26,170 vehicles daily. Of interest is that this is the third busiest location in DOT Region 7, which includes Lewis, Jefferson, St. Lawrence, Franklin, and Clinton counties. In Region 7, the busiest highway is Cornelia St. (Route 3) in Plattsburgh, just east of the Northway (I-87) with an AADT of 35,547, and the second busiest is Arsenal Street (also Route 3) in Watertown, with an AADT of 29,486.

The busiest highway in New York State is on I-95 at the George Washington Bridge in New York City. The AADT there is 276,476. Now, take a guess at the busiest highway in the world. You are probably thinking New York City, or perhaps Los Angeles; or, maybe in China or Japan. Wrong! According to Wikipedia, it’s highway 401, also known as the Macdonald-Cartier Freeway, through Toronto. It is 16 lanes wide and carries between 450,000 and 500,000 vehicles a day (AADT).

With the assistance of DOT’s Brian Staie, the following spread sheet compares a number of roads in the Malone, Saranac Lake, and Tupper Lake villages and surrounding roads with the most recent AADT counts and those from around the year 2000. You can see by the figures most counts have increased somewhat, but not all.

LOCATION	HWY ROUTE #	LOCATION DESCRIPTION	Current AADT	AADT from approx. year 2000
Malone	11	Downtown Malone at bridge	26,170	21,321
Malone	11	Village/Town line - West side of Village	18,239	15,270
Malone	11	Village/Town line - East side of Village	9,329	9,225
Malone	30	Elm St. between Main & Constable	6,876	6,013

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Malone	30	Finney Blvd between Rt 11 & Franklin St	7,020	7,919
Malone	30	Finney Blvd at village line - south side	5,489	4,766
Malone	11B	Between Finney Blvd. and Village line	3,706	3,077
Malone	37	Between Rte. 11 & village line - north	5,446	5,623
Malone	CR 24	Brainairdsville Rd, East of Rt 11	2,912	2,510
Saranac Lake	86	Adjacent to Lake Colby, by hospital	5,285	4,693
Saranac Lake	86	Between Saranac Lake & Ray Brook	10,928	10,200
Saranac Lake	86	Near fire station	11,576	12,317
Saranac Lake	3	Lapan Hwy at village/town line	5,368	5,669
Saranac Lake	3	Between Saranac Lake & Bloomingdale	4,795	4,800
Saranac Lake	3	River St - between Main St & Church St	8,941	8,164
Saranac Lake	CR 33	McKenzie Pond Rd.	2,772	N/A
Tupper Lake	3 & 30	Village/town line near Sunmount	3,958	5,561
Tupper Lake	3	Demars Blvd	8,057	10,217
Tupper Lake	30	Village/town line - south	3,257	3,913

Traffic counts are important to highway departments for a number of reasons, including maintenance and determining levels of service. It is also important in programing traffic signals and even determining if a signal is warranted.

Just remember, when you think traffic is slow and hard to drive in, don't get too irritated - you could be on the 401 in Toronto!