



Cascade Avenue Crosswalk Safety

The public involvement process that shaped Cascade Avenue took into consideration the differing views of stakeholders resulting in a final design that improved functionality for virtually all stakeholders but did not fully cater to any one group. One clear area of compromise was between vehicle drivers wanting to travel this arterial street and pedestrians wanting to cross it. Some drivers thought that pedestrian tunnels, bridges, or signals should be used so that the road functioned better for vehicles. Some pedestrians, on the other hand, thought the road should be closed to vehicles so that pedestrians would not have to worry about cars. The final design that was implemented is a hybrid intending to work better than the old road for both vehicles and pedestrians.

Old Cascade Avenue was 56 feet wide from curb to curb. Vehicles in both directions were expected to yield to pedestrians in the crosswalk in accordance with state law. This caused delays for vehicles that some found unacceptable. New Cascade Avenue is constructed with independent eastbound and westbound roads separated by a 15 feet wide median. Crosswalks across each of these roads are 18 feet wide. The intent of this compromise design is to stop vehicles in one direction rather than stopping vehicles in both directions as a pedestrian uses the crosswalk. Even though the number of crosswalks has doubled, the vehicle delay caused by a single pedestrian drops.

Some drivers have raised a concern that the tall grass in the median may block the line of sight for an eastbound vehicle to see a pedestrian in the crosswalk of the westbound lane. This is good in that it discourages that driver from unnecessarily stopping and increasing vehicle delays. Some pedestrians may think “so what” and not think that such vehicle delays can affect them. They can! If vehicle delays reach an unacceptable level, solutions like pedestrian tunnels, bridges, or signals could be implemented. Most of these “solutions” are less friendly to pedestrians who want to cross the road as quickly and safely as possible.

Is the vegetation dangerous for pedestrians? The vegetation does not inhibit the ability of drivers or pedestrians to follow state laws regarding use of crosswalks. State law prohibits a pedestrian from suddenly leaving a curb or other place of safety and walking into the path of a vehicle which is so close it is difficult for the operator of the vehicle to yield. Also, state law requires a vehicle driver to yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian using the crosswalk in a safe manner.

According to national standards, stopping distance for a vehicle traveling 25 mph is 155 feet and stopping time is about 5.8 seconds. This means that a pedestrian should not leave the curb and enter a crosswalk if there is a car within 155 feet of a crosswalk unless it is clear to the pedestrian that the driver of the vehicle has been able to yield the right-of-way. Even if a vehicle is beyond 155 feet from a crosswalk and the crosswalk flashers are activated, pedestrians should use the safety of the median refuge to convey their intent to enter the crosswalk but wait until it is clear that the driver of the vehicle is going to comply with State law and yield the right-of-way to the pedestrian.

Remember, nobody ever “has” the right-of-way until it has been yielded to them by others. While a driver can be cited for failure to yield the right-of-way, a pedestrian can be killed when they abruptly and unsafely enter a crosswalk or assume that they have the right-of-way.

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