

Traffic Signal – FAQ's

What is the purpose of a traffic signal?

A traffic signal is a traffic control device that is designed to indicate to pedestrians and drivers when it is appropriate to enter the intersection. The signal designates who has the right of way at an intersection or crossing by allowing or prohibiting certain movements. Traffic signals help manage traffic flow, allow pedestrians to cross, and give cross traffic a chance to enter the intersection.

Who decides which intersections need traffic signals?

Following state and federal guidelines, County traffic engineers review and evaluate intersections where signals may be needed to facilitate the flow of traffic. When funds are available, installation is prioritized in locations where they will clearly improve safety and/or enhance efficiency. Future intersection controls are also planned for through long-range planning projects, such as Community Plans. These locations have been included in the County's Capital Improvement Programs, which are available for review on the Public Works website.

How do intersections get considered for installation of a traffic signal?

Traffic engineers recommend traffic signal installation based on the following factors:

- Intersection collision history
- Number of vehicles using the intersection
- Vehicle delay
- Number of pedestrians and bicycle activity
- Other signals in the immediate area
- Intersection characteristics (width, number of lanes, controls, etc.)
- Visibility
- Adjacent land uses
- Local traffic effects



Are there alternatives to a traffic signal?

Roundabouts coordinate the flow of traffic through an intersection, much like a traffic signal. Traffic engineers can determine which application is more appropriate depending on the amount of right-of-way available, traffic volumes, speeds, and other intersection characteristics.



As a pedestrian, do I have to push the button to get the WALK signal?

Yes, use the button for the pedestrian signal if one is available. If you don't push the button, the signal will not detect a pedestrian and the WALK symbol will not light up. Additionally, the button allows for adequate time to cross, which is calculated based on the length of that specific crosswalk. It is not necessary to push the button more than once; pushing it again will not speed it up. If a button is not available, it's possible that the traffic signal has the capability to detect pedestrians on its own.



What if the upraised hand signal starts flashing before I'm through crossing?

It is okay to finish crossing the street when the upraised hand signal is flashing. The flashing upraised hand signal serves as a warning that it is too late to begin crossing. The signals are designed to allow plenty of time to cross safely if the walking person symbol is still on. Some pedestrian signals have a visible count down which will indicate how many seconds you have left to finish crossing.

Pedestrian Safety Tips

- Always look both ways before crossing, even if the signal indicates that it is okay to cross.
- Check for turning vehicles; a motorist may not see you stepping off the curb and may be behind you.
- Cross the street as quickly and as safely as possible.
- **Be alert.** Avoid using mobile devices during crossing.
- Avoid crossing where signs tell you it is restricted or prohibited.