Technical Note

Reducing Public Confusion About the Use of Pedestrian Signals

BY NAZIR LALANI AND BILL BARANOWSKI

The city of San Buenaventura has a policy of providing pedestrian indications at all signalized intersections. During a typical year, the city receives 600 requests from citizens to address traffic-related concerns. Of these 600 requests, about 50 are for the city to change the pedestrian signal timing at a specific intersection to provide for increased walk time. These pedestrians believe they should be able to cross the street during the "Walk" indication before the "Don't Walk" indication begins. The city has devoted a considerable amount of effort to educate pedestrians on how to understand pedestrian indications at signalized intersections by developing signs instructing pedestrians on how to use pedestrian signal push buttons, a brochure that is sent out to residents explaining how pedestrian signals work, and the conversion of existing Walk/Don't Walk indications to the new symbol indications.

Public Education

Signs at Signalized Intersection

The city developed the sign shown in Figure 1 to improve pedestrian understanding of pedestrian indications at signalized intersections. The sign was based on an original design used in Orlando, Florida. The sign is installed above each pedestrian push button. However, San Buenaventura does not install such signs at every signalized intersection. Signs typically are installed where at least 10 pedestrians an hour use the crosswalks and at other high pedestrian traffic generating areas such as hospitals and schools. The signs cost $7 each to make. The total cost including installation time is about $200 an intersection.

The sign in Figure 2 shows an alternative design recommended by Wolf Homburger, who reviewed the city's sign and provided useful comments incorporated into the alternative design. The authors think the sign in Figure 2 provides a more direct message and should be used by any agency comtemplating the use of such signs.

Educational Brochure

When residents complain to the city about an intersection where they believe the crossing time is inadequate, they are sent a brochure (Figure 3) that is designed to explain how pedestrian signals operate. Not only has the brochure proved an educational boon, it has reduced the amount of time spent writing out responses. The city also has developed similar brochures explaining the use of stop signs, the basis on which traffic signals are installed, installing marked crosswalks at uncontrolled intersections, installing flashing beacons, how speed limits are determined, and the use of speed bumps or humps on city streets.

Converting to Symbol-Type Pedestrian Signal Indications

To improve understanding of pedestrian phases at signalized intersections, the city is in the process of converting all of the Walk/Don't Walk signal indications to symbol-type pedestrian signal indications. This conversion program was to have been completed by the end of 1992. The projected cost was about $1,500 an intersection, with 70 intersections to convert, the total cost is about $100,000.

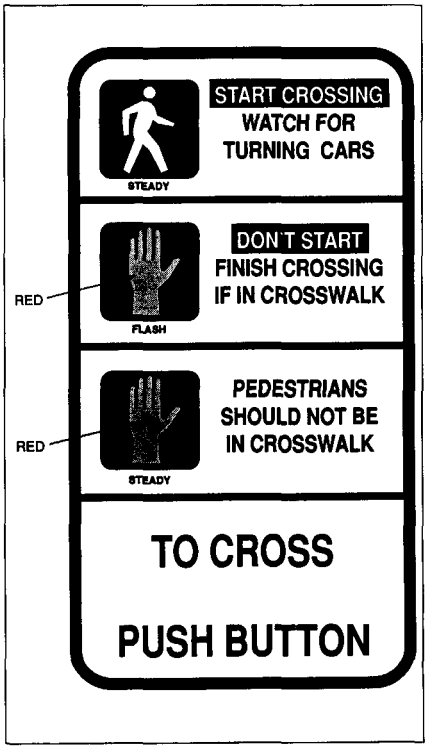


Figure 1. The city of San Buenaventura developed this sign to improve pedestrian understanding of pedestrian indications at signalized intersections.

Figure 2. An alternative to the original San Buenaventura design, this sign provides a more direct message and is recommended for use by agencies contemplating the use of such signs.

Recommendation

The authors recommends the sign shown in Figure 2 be considered for adoption in the next edition of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.[1]

Additional Information

There appears to be a continuing lack of understanding by pedestrians on how to use pedestrian phases at signalized intersections. The above strategies, which include installing pedestrian education signs, developing an educational brochure program, and converting pedestrian indications to the symbol-type, can be adopted by any agency. The city of San Buenaventura would be happy to provide copies of artwork for the educational signs and copies of the various brochures that the city uses to educate the public concerning various aspects of traffic engineering. Requests should be sent to: Nazir Lalani, City Transportation Engineer, P.O. Box 99, Ventura, CA 93002.

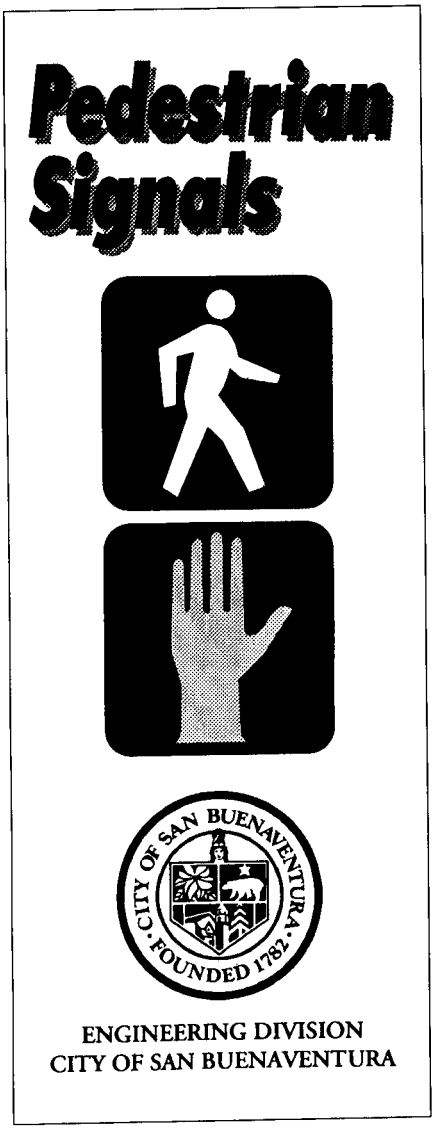
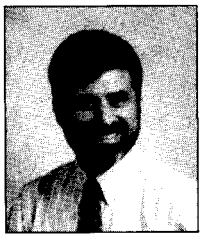


Figure 3. Part of the brochure designed by San Buenaventura in response to inquiries about pedestrian signals.

References

1. Federal Highway Administration. *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*. Washington, DC: FHWA, 1988. ■



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