

## Pedestrian Signal Planning Q&A

Many years ago when traffic volumes were much lower than they are today, pedestrians could take their cues from the same traffic lights as motorists. Since then new signals were introduced to improve pedestrian safety. We hope to answer the most common questions about pedestrian signals.

### Why are pedestrian signals available at some intersections and not at others?

Pedestrian signals are installed at intersections for two main reasons: a high volume of foot traffic, or, the signals that direct motorists do not meet the needs of pedestrians.

For example, some intersections occur at odd angles and the traffic signals can't be seen by pedestrians. At other locations, turning and merging lanes make intersections so complex that special provisions must be made for pedestrians.

### Shouldn't pedestrian signals be available at every intersection?

If existing traffic signals meet the needs of people on foot — the signals are easy to see and provide plenty of time to cross safely — there is no need for special pedestrian signals.

### Why are the words WALK and DON'T WALK being replaced by symbols?

Transportation engineers worldwide are moving toward the use of symbols in place of words on signs because they are easier for people to comprehend in a shorter amount of time. Easily recognized symbols also accommodate people who don't read English.

In the case of pedestrian signals, both word and symbol signs are currently in use. Here's what they mean:



### Why does it always say DON'T WALK before I've completed crossing the street?

The flashing DON'T WALK or upraised hand is a warning to people who have not yet entered the intersection. It means that it is too late to start to safely cross the street before the traffic signal changes and allows cars to proceed. Signals are timed to allow plenty of time for people who have already started walking to safely cross the street.

### Is it really necessary for me to push a button to activate the pedestrian signal? Can't I just wait for the light to change?

Buttons are available to pedestrians at locations where the traffic light is set for cars, not for people on foot. If you don't activate the pedestrian signal by pushing the button, the pedestrian signal across the main roadway will not activate, and the traffic light may not give you enough time to safely cross the street. You only need to push the button once for it to be activated.

### Can I count on a safe crossing if I carefully follow the pedestrian signals?

The signals assign your legal rights in the intersection. However, it is important to be cautious when crossing busy intersections.



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