



CITY OF KIRKLAND
Department of Public Works
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www.ci.kirkland.wa.us

To: Dave Ramsay, City Manager

From: Daryl Grigsby, Public Works Director
David Godfrey, P.E., Transportation Engineering Manager

Date: July 5, 2007

Subject: CORRESPONDENCE FROM MS. JULIA KAST

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council authorize the Mayor to sign a letter of response to Ms. Kast, who wrote to suggest longer walk times at the intersection of 3rd Street and Central Way.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

Traffic engineers have struggled with having understandable walk signals since such signals first appeared almost 60 years ago. The flashing hand does not intuitively convey the message "keep walking but don't start". This leads many people, including Ms. Kast, to think that crossing should be completed while the walking figure is on. Actually, crossing can be safely completed during the flashing don't walk phase. Countdown signals help with this problem and they are being installed in new signals in Kirkland. Countdown signals display the number of seconds left in the flashing don't walk phase and is much more easily understood than the flashing hand alone. The intersection of Lake and Kirkland has been retrofitted with countdown signals.

New guidance will soon be published about walking speeds and the timing of pedestrian phases. Since Kirkland has been using times that are more generous than the national standard, it is unclear whether or not changes will need to be made, but we will be evaluating our signals to ensure that they meet this new guidance. The new rules reduce the standard walking speed from 4.0 feet/second to 3.5 feet/second for evaluating the flashing don't walk, and use 3.0 feet/second for evaluating the combined walk and flashing don't walk phases.

Julia Kast

City of Kirkland
Mayor's Office
123 Fifth Avenue
Kirkland, WA 98033

Subject: Pedestrian Signal's

Dear Mayor Lauinger:

If you ever have walked around downtown Kirkland you may have walked across 3rd and Central, I have realized that the pedestrian signal signs only let you walk for about 5 seconds maybe even less than that. That lets you walk not even one fourth of the way across the street before it flashes not to walk. The sound is fine and you can hear the sound ok if you were blind or have a different need.

This is a problem because there are kids of all ages walking downtown. Also when the Pedestrian sign turns into a red stop hand and the people are still in the street and a light turns green. You never know if a car will stop or go and get somebody seriously injured. Especially elderly people, some of them are slower than others, so they need more time to walk across the street. Last it is a four way intersection so it is super dangerous. That is why, with not a lot of time to cross the street it is a problem.

I have a suggestion for you, you do not have to follow it, please read my suggestion and why it is important. My suggestion is give people at least 15 seconds to try to get closer to the other side of the street before letting the light start flashing. This is very important because if you don't let people have a longer time to cross the street with enough time to actually make it at least half way across the street they will get angry or injured. People will also stop walking downtown and not get enough exercise and then, we could never make it to the top of the healthiest Cities list and at least be in the top ten.

Sincerely,



Julia Kast
5th Grader at
Peter Kirk Elementary

July 18, 2007

DRAFT

Ms. Julia Kast
[REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Kast:

Thank you for your letter concerning crosswalk signal timing. We're glad that you're out walking and thinking of ways to make things better.

Pedestrian signals can be confusing. Here's what they mean:

The walking figure means "It's okay to START walking"



After the walking figure goes away, the flashing hand comes on.



The flashing hand is the signal that is least understood. It means: It's OKAY TO FINISH CROSSING but it's not okay to start walking. Finally, the hand stops flashing and stays lit. This means DO NOT START crossing.

Therefore, we usually time the signals in the following way; the walking figure stays on long enough for a person to leave the curb and start crossing the street. The flashing hand stays on long enough to allow even people who don't walk too fast to finish crossing. So, most of the time people will not cross the street all the way on the walking figure; some of the crossing will be done during the flashing hand. A number of studies have been done to determine how fast people walk and some new practices have been recommended for setting the times of the walking figure and flashing hand. We hope that implementing these practices will make it better for everyone.

Correspondence to Ms. Julia Kast

July 18, 2007

Page 2

Many people think it's odd to walk during the flashing hand, because it looks like the hand is trying to say "don't walk!" In order to help people understand the signals better, the countdown signal was invented. It looks like this:



The numbers on the right countdown during the flashing don't walk phase so that pedestrians know how much time is left. Unlike the flashing hand alone, when people see the flashing hand and the counter they automatically understand what it means. We've added this type of signal at the intersection of Lake Street and Kirkland Avenue. We also plan to add them on new signals that we build.

Once again we salute you for walking in Kirkland and more importantly for being aware of your environment and helping to make it better! If you have any other questions about pedestrian safety or treatments at crosswalks, please contact David Godfrey, Transportation Engineering Manager in the Public Works Department at (425) 587-3865 or dgodfrey@ci.kirkland.wa.us.

Sincerely,
KIRKLAND CITY COUNCIL

James L. Lauinger
Mayor