



Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board

*Stewards of the
Pedestrian Master Plan*

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To: Seattle City Council Sustainability & Transportation Committee
(Councilmembers Mike O'Brien, Abel Pacheco, Kshama Sawant, Bruce Harrell)
cc: SDOT Director Sam Zimbabwe

Subject: Upcoming SDOT Signal Policy Presentation on September 17th

The Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board (SPAB) has recently learned that Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) staff will be briefing the Council Sustainability & Transportation Committee on September 17th regarding a proposed signal policy. SPAB hopes that this policy will clearly prioritize the safety and needs of people walking and rolling, and would like to see the following included:

- Increasing the time given for pedestrians to cross the street, during both the white “Walk” signal and the flashing red countdown. Current timing is often too short for people whose natural walking or rolling speed is closer to 2.5 feet/second.
- Prohibiting the use of “permissive” left turns during the same phase that pedestrians are given a “Walk” signal. The 2016 Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Analysis found that 67% of collisions involving a pedestrian happened at an intersection with a signal, and that 29% of total pedestrian-involved collisions were a “left hook,” where a left-turning vehicle struck a pedestrian travelling straight.
- Limiting or altogether banning the use of so-called “beg buttons” that force pedestrians to either wait unnecessarily or arrive at an intersection early and request permission to cross. The buttons should be retained (and installed at other intersections that lack them) in order to provide accessible crossing signals, but their use should not be required in order to get a “Walk” signal. If people in cars are permitted to cross the street, people walking and rolling should be too.
- Incorporating passive pedestrian detection and transit signal priority into the adaptive signal system. Downtown growth can only be accommodated by facilitating improved bus, bike, rail, and pedestrian transportation infrastructure. As illustrated in our previous letter, the current adaptive signal system can harm these goals if it doesn't include passive pedestrian detection and transit signal priority. Counting cars instead of people has a detrimental impact on other modes of traffic.

The Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board shall advise the City Council, the Mayor and all the offices of the city on matters related to pedestrians and the impacts which actions by the city may have upon the pedestrian environment; and shall have the opportunity to contribute to all aspects of the city's planning insofar as they relate to the pedestrian safety and access.

*-City Council Resolution
28791*

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Unfortunately, SPAB has not been involved in the development of whatever policy or program SDOT staff will be presenting to the Committee. In June of this year, SDOT convened a workshop with community stakeholders about adaptive signals. Members of SPAB were not invited and were explicitly told not to attend this workshop, despite the 2019-2020 budget proviso GS 35-1-A-3-2019 specifically requesting that SDOT “present to the Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board (SPAB) on the department’s efforts to implement adaptive signal technology and address the concerns raised by SPAB.” No subsequent workshop or presentation has occurred.

At the time, SDOT staff repeatedly assured us that a pilot Operational Advisory Committee or Signal Advisory Committee would be formed “later in the year” and would include SPAB along with representatives from the other modal boards, the disability community, and the transportation equity program. This committee has not yet been formed, and no plans regarding either the committee or the development of a signal policy have been shared with SPAB.

While we look forward to working constructively with SDOT staff to develop a signal policy centered on the safety and needs of pedestrians, SPAB remains very concerned about the lack of both transparency and urgency in this program.

Sincerely,

David Seater, Chair
On behalf of the Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board