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Beacon helps pedestrians cross safely

ODOT partners with area agencies on a solution at busy SW 178th and TV Highway

The Oregon Department of Transportation is using new technology and time-tested partnerships to help protect pedestrians crossing the highway at a busy Aloha crosswalk.

The Tualatin Valley Highway is known for busy traffic conditions with long, flat stretches connecting suburbs and cities including Beaverton, Aloha, Hillsboro and Portland. At the intersection of TV Highway and 178th, bus stops and a convenience store add to steady foot traffic crossing the highway. Over the years at that intersection, pedestrians have been struck by vehicles, and rear-end crashes have occurred as drivers brake abruptly for pedestrians in the crosswalk.

ODOT recently installed a Rapid Flash Beacon adjacent to the highway lanes in an effort to help alert drivers when pedestrians are ready to use the crosswalk and to remind drivers that they are responsible for stopping to allow pedestrians to cross.

The yellow lights are designed to be visible to approaching motorists by emitting an emergency-type flash when pedestrians press a signed roadside button.



“This is relatively new technology, but it is quickly building a track record of success in other states and cities around the country,” said ODOT Region 1 Manager Jason Tell.

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Tell added that the warning light is no substitute for attentive drivers and alert, cautious pedestrians. Officials from Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, who respond to crashes, agreed.

“Pedestrians mistakenly think drivers can see them, or that drivers know they are responsible for stopping for pedestrians in a crosswalk,” said TVF&R Public Information Officer Karen Eubanks. “But, especially on busy roads outside the city, it’s important for pedestrians to realize that they are responsible for their own safety. No signal light can replace alertness and caution.”

Washington County Sheriff’s deputies will devote officers to monitoring the intersection in the months ahead to make sure drivers obey the beacon and drive cautiously in the area.

Pedestrian activity at the intersection is further increased by riders taking the Line 57-TV Hwy/Forest Grove bus. TriMet has produced educational signage for the bus shelter that explains to pedestrians how the rapid flashing beacon works.

“With many of our riders crossing at this intersection, we’re pleased that they can cross more safely when they activate the flashing beacon,” said Mary Fetsch, TriMet Communications Director. “We applaud ODOT for their effort to create safer conditions for pedestrians and motorists in this busy corridor.”

The Willamette Valley Pedestrian Coalition was among the area groups who worked with ODOT to prioritize the installation of the beacon. WPC officials said they support the rights of pedestrians, but said they believe the only solution for a safer intersection at TV Highway and 178th involves both motorists and pedestrians taking responsibility for their safety.

“We’re very pleased to see the state working to improve dangerous areas for pedestrians,” said Steph Routh of the Willamette Pedestrian Coalition. “This beacon is a good start, and we believe it is investments in safer crossings like this that will make TV Highway better for all road users.”

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