FRIENDS OF THE LEGACY TRAIL

To support, promote, enhance and protect The Legacy Trail, a Sarasota County Park, and its trail connectors now and for future generations.

Dear Commissioners: January 20, 2022

I am writing to alert you to a serious safety issue existing along the new extension of The Legacy Trail and to ask for your assistance in resolving it. As you know, High-intensity Activated CrosswalK (HAWK) signals were installed at major streets crossed by the trail extension. They are intended to allow safe passage by trail users. When activated by a pedestrian or cyclist, the signals stop vehicular traffic through a sequence of light patterns for the motorists and trail users.

The problem arises because in one phase of this sequence (as currently programmed) vehicles are informed they can proceed cautiously with a flashing red light while trail users are still viewing a countdown of time remaining to cross the intersection. This is contrary to typical intersections, where countdown timers convey to pedestrian or cyclists that they have the right of way. They do not expect street vehicles to enter the intersection or traverse the crosswalk.

Given the speed of cyclists (15 mph is allowed on The Trail) a cyclist may believe he has plenty of time to cross, while a driver believes they can go forward. If we were dealing only with pedestrians, people would be confused as it is, but the sight lines would tend to prevent a mishap. But with a cyclist watching the countdown and a car not expecting a fast moving bike, the likelihood of a serious mishap only multiplies because both assume they can proceed.

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) has identified this as a problem with HAWK signals on bicycle trails. In the current NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide they specifically address HAWK signals and recommend that HAWK beacons “should maintain the solid red indication for motorists throughout the full bicycle clearance interval.”

Friends of The Legacy Trail raised this issue with County staff months ago and were informed that Public Works - Traffic Engineering & Operations is reviewing the problem. From our prospective, time is of the essence. A solution is available and needs to be implemented post-haste. It would be a tragedy if someone was seriously injured or killed due to the County’s lack of compliance with recommended standard practices.

Thank you.

Louis W. Kosiba
President, Friends of The Legacy Trail

cc Jonathan Lewis, Nichole Rissler, Spencer Anderson, Jon Robinson

Attachment: Background and Supporting Information

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Prior to 2010 the operation of HAWK signals was governed by Section 4F of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). This section of the MUTCD addresses the use of HAWK beacons for pedestrian crossings but does not consider their use with bicycle crossings.

In 2010 the city of Portland Oregon, in cooperation with the Federal Highway Department, embarked on a study of HAWK intersection usage at bicycle crossings. In their report, one of the primary recommendation was that the flashing red segment shown to drivers should be changed to a solid red light for the entire countdown period. The reasons given for this recommendation were (quote):

The initial operation of the Hawk signals displayed a flashing Red vehicle signal during the FDW pedestrian indication. This was changed shortly after the signal turn-on due to several field observations:

- *Vehicles that were stopped due to steady Red would observe the signal change to flashing Red. Although the meaning of flashing Red requires each vehicle in the queue to stop at the stop bar, vehicles in the queue would proceed without stopping. These motorists did not check to the left or right for a second pedestrian or slower pedestrians who were obscured from their view by another vehicle.*
- *The use of countdown pedestrian signals also played a part in that the able bodied often start crossing after the beginning of FDW because pedestrians assume protection until the count gets to zero.*
- *At a typical signalized intersection, pedestrian WALK and FDW indications convey to the pedestrian that they have the right of way, so they do not expect main street vehicles to enter the intersection or traverse the crosswalk.*
- *Vehicles stopped at the stop bar for a short period of time and continued through the intersection when pedestrians were in the crosswalk.*

Motorists did not obey Oregon's 1.5 lane pedestrian clearance rule. The Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) desires a variance from the guidance from MUTCD to allow use of vehicle Steady Red during the FDW interval. This way, the operation of the FDW is consistent with user expectations at typical signalized intersections. The variance will result in additional delay to motorists but in our opinion a safer operation for pedestrians, which is a higher priority.

In 2010 NACTO published the Urban Bikeway Design Guide. The current version of the guide specifically addresses HAWK signals (referred to as hybrid beacons in the report) and makes the following recommendation:

"In particular, because of the speed at which bicyclists can enter the intersection and because many bicyclists will actually speed up when presented with a flashing "DONT WALK" indication, hybrid beacons should maintain the solid red indication for motorists throughout the full bicycle clearance interval (yellow plus all-red)."

In 2013 the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a memorandum entitled "GUIDANCE: Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Design Flexibility" in which they expressed their openness to recommendations in guides published by NACTO and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). In the memorandum they state: " The vast majority of treatments illustrated in the NACTO Guide are either allowed or not precluded by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)".