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Illinois Drivers Must Stop for Pedestrians Law Observational Study of Motorists' Compliance

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Overview of the Law

The purpose of this study was to observationally test the compliance of motorists with the Illinois “Drivers Must Stop for Pedestrians” Law throughout Chicago and the suburbs. When first enacted, the law stated that motorists should yield to pedestrians, and the law was difficult to interpret and enforce. But after revision in 2010, the law states that motorists must come to a complete stop for pedestrians in crosswalks, even those without stop signs, traffic lights, or other signage.

The law goes hand-in-hand with the state’s “Complete Streets” policy for making roadways accessible and safe for all users. Pedestrians are the most vulnerable users of roadways, and pedestrian injuries and fatalities are all-too-common in metropolitan Chicago. According to the Illinois Department of Transportation, there were over 4700 reported pedestrian crashes with 130 fatalities in Illinois in 2012; 84 percent of the crashes and 69 percent of pedestrian fatalities in Illinois occurred in metro Chicago. In the city of Chicago, pedestrian fatalities accounted for 1/3 of all traffic fatalities in 2012 compared to roughly 14 percent statewide.

In metro Chicago, traffic crashes of all kinds (car, bike, pedestrian) predominantly happen where you will find many people walk, biking and crossing streets: neighborhood streets and arterials. Only 6 percent of traffic fatalities and 14 percent of traffic crashes happen on expressways in Illinois’ urban areas, according to IDOT.

The “Must Stop” law is intended to help people on foot get across streets safely, provide clear direction to motorists on their responsibilities, and to give police clear guidelines for regulation and ticketing. Another important benefit of this law is that it can encourage walking by allowing pedestrians to cross a roadway at any uncontrolled, legal crosswalk. This can reduce the long distances between controlled crosswalks.

Overview of the Observational Study

This study compared marked versus unmarked crosswalks on two lane roadways. Results for marked crosswalks were subdivided into common marked crosswalks and those with additional safety features. A crosswalk is the part of the roadway at an intersection that has a sidewalk on one or both sides of the road that laterally match, with curbs or no curbs, and with in-street markings or no in-street markings.

The following were considered “Unmarked Crosswalks”

- Unpainted crosswalks

The following were considered “Marked Crosswalks”

- Painted
- In-street “Must Stop for Pedestrians” signage
- “Must Stop” signs located on the parkway or sidewalk
- Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon: user-actuated LEDs that supplement warning signs at unsignalized intersections or mid-block crosswalks typically located on the side of the roadway. (Source: U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration.) One observed site has flashing lights embedded in the pavement.
- *HAWK signal: also known as Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon is a user-activated warning sign that sits over the roadway.
- Brick/stone crosswalks
- Raised crosswalks
- A combination of two or more of the above

Observations were taken at 52 sites throughout Chicagoland. At each of the sites, four trials were completed, giving a total of 208 trials. A trial consisted of a crosswalk subject standing with one foot in the street giving a clear indication to a motorist the desire to cross the crosswalk. The crosswalk subject waited to approach the crosswalk until a motorist had plenty of time to be able to see the crosswalk subject clearly.

The data presented here is for compliance by the cars in the "near lane" next to where the crossing subject was entering the street. Compliance of motorists was observed in the far lane and data collected, but due to different behavior of motorists once the crossing subject was in the middle of the crosswalk this data is not included in this conclusion.

Vehicles in the far lane stopped the vast majority of the time when a near lane vehicle stopped and the pedestrian began to cross. However, in some trials, far lane vehicles failed to stop even after near lane vehicles did, leaving the crossing subject stuck in the middle of the street.

Results

In this study, “initial compliance” means the first car in a wave of cars in any given trial stopped for the crosswalk subject, while “partial compliance” means one car within a wave of cars stopped for the crosswalk subject.

OVERALL COMPLIANCE:

- **Initial compliance: 40/208 trials the first motorist complied with the law.**
- **Partial compliance: 52/208 trials at least one motorist in wave of traffic complied with the law.**

UNMARKED CROSSWALKS:

Initial compliance: 4/88 trials motorists complied with the law at unmarked crosswalks.

Partial compliance: 12/88 trials motorists complied with the law at unmarked crosswalks.

COMMON MARKED (PAINTED) CROSSWALKS:

Initial compliance: 15/84 trials motorists complied with the law at marked crosswalks.

Partial compliance: 13/84 trials motorists complied with the law at marked crosswalks.

MARKED CROSSWALKS WITH OTHER SAFETY FEATURES (BRICKS, RAISED, IN-STREET SIGNAGE, PARKWAY SIGNAGE, FLASHING BEACONS):

Initial compliance: 22/36 trials motorists complied with the law at marked crosswalks.

Partial compliance: 4/36 trials motorists complied with the law at marked crosswalks.

Conclusions

The applicability of the results for the region as a whole or any particular community is limited by the scope and design of the study, in terms of the number of sites evaluated and how well the observed crosswalks represent those throughout the region. However, it is apparent that Chicagoland

motorists were significantly more noncompliant with the law than they were compliant. Initial compliance was very low at unmarked crosswalks (5 percent) and higher, but still low, at common marked crosswalks (18 percent). Initial compliance was significantly higher at marked crosswalks with other safety features (61 percent).

Active Trans was unable to ascertain what percentage of all crosswalks in the Chicago region fall into these three categories. For example, 19 percent of our trials occurred at crosswalks with additional safety features. We suspect that the region-wide percentage is significantly lower, and this would skew the overall results.

*Note: Since an intersection with a HAWK signal is considered a controlled intersection, the results from the 4 trials performed at this location with the signals activated (for which the first vehicle complied each time) were not included in the overall compliance numbers. 4 trials were taken without the signals activated, with no compliance each time. These results are included in the compliance numbers.