



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of Transportation and
Public Facilities

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
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May 27, 2015

Mark Gorman
Municipal Administrator
City and Borough of Sitka
100 Lincoln Street
Sitka, AK 99835-7540

Dear Mr. Gorman:

Thank you for your April 24, 2015, letter regarding intersection safety in Sitka. I appreciate this opportunity to respond to your concerns, explain the department's position, and to identify some opportunities for further cooperation.

Pedestrian and driver safety are paramount considerations for the department. We do our best to address safety needs in the communities we serve. Your letter and clearly-stated comments are very much appreciated, since local input is a key component of the department's continuing efforts to enhance system-wide safety and respond to local concerns.

Physical intersection and pedestrian safety enhancement decisions are program-based and statistically driven. While we strive to fully respond to local suggestions for improvements, we cannot always accommodate all of the requests made. However, we will explain our parameters, and work as closely as possible with the City and Borough of Sitka (CBS) regarding your specific concerns and requests.

I am pleased that you found the April 2 visit by staff from the department's Southcoast Regional office productive. During that visit, there was much discussion about the intersections mentioned in your letter. I have asked our staff to respond technically to each of the areas of concern you raised. The following summary details the department's positions:

- Harbor Drive and Maksoutoff Street - The crosswalk at the Harbor Drive and Maksoutoff Street intersection has been restriped. As you know, new advance pedestrian warning signs have already been installed.
- Lake Street and Etolin Street - The crosswalk at Lake Street and Etolin Street was decommissioned following installation of a new traffic signal at Lake and Lincoln. This was due to Lake/Etolin intersection's close proximity to the new signal. As per policy, we purposely do not mark crosswalks close to signals. Rather, we encourage pedestrians to cross in the safer environment of a signalized intersection; in this case, equipped with marked crosswalks and pedestrian crossing controls. In order to enhance a safer crossing environment, we do not intend to restripe the Lake/Etolin crosswalk.

- Raptor Way and Sawmill Creek Road - In lieu of marking a new crosswalk at Raptor Way and Sawmill Creek Road, we believe it is safer and more cost-effective to use the existing crosswalks at Jarvis Street and Indian River Road. The distance between the trailhead and the marked Jarvis Street crosswalk is 130 feet. A related solution would involve realigning the trail so that it terminates at the Jarvis Street crosswalk. This would be contingent upon obtaining right-of-way from Sheldon Jackson College, the presumed property owner. Closer to town, there exists a lighted overhead pedestrian warning sign at the Indian River Road intersection. Safety would be enhanced by providing wayfinding signs or similar guidance to pedestrians as encouragement to cross Sawmill Creek Road at these locations. Existing pedestrian warning signs could be replaced as needed to meet current retroreflectivity standards. Pedestrian crossing signage (with diagonal downward pointing arrows) could be established at the Indian River crossing to provide further delineation.
- Halibut Point Road (HPR) and Peterson Street - The crosswalk at HPR and Peterson Street was recently upgraded with additional warning signs and handheld pedestrian crossing flags. In accordance with policy, measures such as these should be undertaken before establishment of more sophisticated traffic control devices such as a rectangular rapid flashing beacon (RRFB).
- HPR and Kashevaroff Street - The HPR and Kashevaroff Street intersection currently lacks a marked crosswalk. A prerequisite to installation of pedestrian activated warning lights, such as RRFB's, is the existence of a marked crosswalk. Given the setting and associated parameters, the HPR/Kashevaroff intersection can be considered a candidate for a marked crosswalk. However, further information is needed before a final determination can be made, including the measurement of pedestrian crossing volumes and an assessment of the stopping sight distance on the HPR outbound approach.
- HPR and Blatchley Middle School - Your letter also requests the establishment of a RRFB at the crosswalk on HPR serving Blatchley Middle School. This intersection is in the middle of a school zone flashing light assembly, is adequately signed, and there are overhead beacons at the crosswalk. In addition, we understand that there is a school zone crossing guard during school hours. Our analysis indicates that there is already sufficient infrastructure, and that additional traffic control devices are not presently warranted.

On a policy level view, you correctly noted that the locations in question do not meet the criteria for RRFB establishment, while also pointing out that RRFB's can be considered when certain other conditions are present, such as a pedestrian accident history, high avoidance maneuver occurrence, and/or school crossings on a rural National Highway System (NHS) route. Our data suggests that these conditions are not present at the discussed locations.

With respect to pedestrian accident history, staff extracted data for the full lengths of both HPR and Sawmill Creek Road for the entire 13-year period of available crash data. We found that of the combined total of 401 reported crashes on both routes, only nine involved pedestrians and none occurred at any of the intersections in question. Furthermore, we have determined that Sitka does not fit the rural route school crossing parameter; the crossings in question are in an urban setting. Outside of the above-stated determinations, in order to give RRFB installation full consideration, we would need to further assess the magnitude of avoidance maneuver occurrences.

Finally, I would like to clarify the policy document referenced in your letter. Satisfying the conditions specified in Section 4L.100 of the Alaska Traffic Manual Supplement does not obligate the department to install RRFB's. Rather, it gives us the leeway to do so, based upon individual site characteristics and sound engineering judgment.

The absence of a pedestrian crash history at the subject intersections is a central factor in our considerations. Based on the numbers, it appears that the existing complement of devices appears to

be performing satisfactorily. Unquestionably, there have been and will continue to be instances of avoidance maneuvers and driver noncompliance, but no device will totally prevent that from happening.

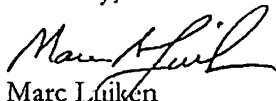
Upon having considered the information developed in preparing this reply, I am satisfied that we meet federal and state standards for pedestrian safety at intersections. At some point, the presence of physical safety enhancements should be supported with both enforcement and educational measures to maximize pedestrian and driver safety through compliance and knowledge of prevailing conditions.

With that said, we would however support your efforts, on a limited basis, to install RRFB's within state right-of-way. Subject to our review and approval, the CBS could be permitted to establish RRFB's at two of the locations discussed; specifically, HPR/Peterson and HPR/Kashevaroff. While the installation, operation, and maintenance would be done entirely at CBS expense, the department will support your efforts to evaluate the establishment of RRFB's at these locations. The installations could be permitted contingent upon meeting established criteria for crosswalks at uncontrolled intersections. This would include validation of avoidance maneuvers, determination of pedestrian volumes, and an evaluation of sight distance.

I appreciate your efforts in making your concerns known. I can assure you that we will work with you to maintain and enhance pedestrian safety in Sitka. To that end, the department stands ready to support the CBS in the further evaluation of the Raptor Way and Sawmill Creek Road crossings and the potential establishment of RRFB's at the locations disclosed.

As always, please feel free to contact me with any further questions. If you have any additional questions please contact David Epstein, Southcoast Region Traffic and Safety Engineer, at (907) 465-4483.

Sincerely,



Marc L. Luiken
Commissioner

Cc: Senator Bert Stedman
Michael Harmon, CBS Public Works Director
Dan Tadic, CBS Municipal Engineer