

Pedestrian Crossing Signals

October 19, 2016

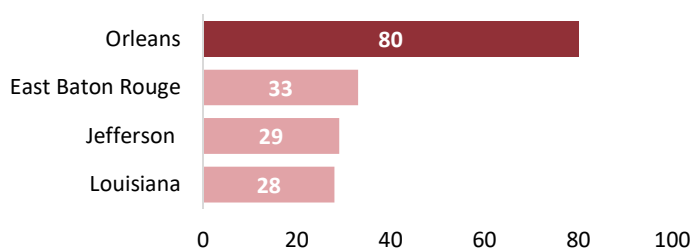
What the OIG Found

Orleans Parish had more pedestrian fatalities than any other parish in the state from 2013 to 2015. In four of the last five years, Orleans Parish had more than twice the rate of pedestrian injuries than in Jefferson or East Baton Rouge parishes.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, pedestrian crossing signals increase pedestrian safety. Yet 87 percent of signalized intersections in New Orleans did not have pedestrian crossing signals. A longstanding informal practice at the Department of Public Works (DPW) restricted the use of pedestrian signals, and decisions about when and where to install walk signals were based on a “gut call.” As a result, New Orleans had far fewer walk signals than did any of the cities used by the City to benchmark its performance.



Average Number of Pedestrian Injuries per 100,000 people, 2011-2015



In spring 2016 the City began installing additional pedestrian signals and upgrading outmoded signals to countdown timers at 44 intersections downtown. However, the upgrade did not incorporate specifications in the City’s Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan, adopted in 2013, or the Complete Streets ordinance passed by the City Council in 2011.

Evaluators also found that the City did not have a system for tracking traffic signal infrastructure assets, a necessary first step in order to develop a systematic maintenance schedule that could improve safety and reduce repair and replacement costs. In the absence of a maintenance schedule, the DPW relied on citizen calls to 311 to find out when traffic lights were out. Calls to 311 provided neither complete nor reliable information about the status of signalized infrastructure in New Orleans.

What the OIG Recommended

To increase pedestrian safety, the OIG offered the following recommendations:

- The City should develop and implement a pedestrian crossing signal policy that increases the number of pedestrian crossing signals in New Orleans;
- The City should build internal organizational structures that will help achieve the pedestrian goals in the Master Plan and the Complete Streets ordinance;
- Public investments in infrastructure should be compliant with ADA standards and the DPW’s ADA Transition Plan;
- The City should develop a GIS-based asset management system for traffic equipment and other street infrastructure; and
- The City should develop an inspection and maintenance program for infrastructure at signalized intersections to improvement performance, reduce maintenance costs, and prolong the life of city equipment.

Purpose of This Report

The City made enhancing the walkability of city streets a priority in its 2010 Master Plan, the *Plan for the 21st Center: New Orleans 2030*, and in its Complete Streets ordinance adopted by the City Council in 2011. To assess the City’s stated commitment to “safe ... sidewalks, paths and intersections for pedestrians,” OIG evaluators examined the effectiveness of policies and practices governing decisions about the installation and maintenance of pedestrian crossing signals, and determined whether the number and type of signals were consistent with best practices.

