

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Orleans Parish had more pedestrian fatalities than any other parish in the state in 2013 through 2015; for four of the last five years, it had more than twice the rate of pedestrian injuries than in Jefferson and East Baton Rouge parishes.

Pedestrian crossing signals increase pedestrian safety. According to a 2008 report by the Federal Highway Administration, adding a pedestrian crossing signal to an intersection where none previously existed reduced the chances of a crash involving a pedestrian by 50 to 55 percent, and upgrading a pedestrian signal to a countdown timer to let people know how much time they had to cross the street decreased the chance of a crash involving a pedestrian by 25 percent. Yet as of early 2016 only 13 percent of signalized intersections in New Orleans had pedestrian crossing signals.

Evaluators examined the effectiveness of policies and practices at the City's Department of Public Works governing decisions about the installation and maintenance of pedestrian crossing signals and assessed whether they were in compliance with national best practices and traffic engineering standards. They also compared pedestrian crossing signal coverage in New Orleans with that of municipalities that the City used to benchmark its performance.

Evaluators inspected downtown intersections on local roads identified in the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance as corridors intended for multiple users, including cars, buses, streetcars, bicycles, and pedestrians. Evaluators inventoried crossing signals and other pedestrian infrastructure at intersections and assessed the condition and upkeep of traffic signal equipment.

Evaluators found that a decades-long informal DPW custom restricted the use of pedestrian crossing signals and did not comply with traffic engineering standards. The City's Chief Traffic Engineer reported recently abandoning the longstanding practice, but the DPW had not developed written guidelines for when signals should be installed. Decisions about where to install pedestrian crossing signals were based on a "gut call."

In spring 2016 the City began installing additional pedestrian signals and upgrading outmoded signals to countdown timers at 44 downtown intersections. However, the upgrade did not incorporate specifications in the City's ADA Transition Plan,

adopted in 2013, or the Complete Streets ordinance passed by the City Council in 2011. The ADA Transition Plan called for the City to use pedestrian signals with pushbuttons, sound, and vibrations to assist people who were visually impaired.

Evaluators also found that the City did not have a system for tracking infrastructure such as traffic signal equipment and pedestrian signals. Cataloging and managing traffic infrastructure assets is necessary in order to develop a systematic maintenance schedule that can reduce repair and replacement costs, reduce the number of outages, and prolong the life of equipment. Without an inspection and maintenance schedule, the DPW relied on citizen calls to 311 to find out when traffic lights were out.

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;
- The City should develop an inspection and maintenance program infrastructure at signalized intersections to improve performance, reduce maintenance costs, and prolong the life of city equipment.

The City has agreed to implement the OIG recommendations about pedestrian crossing signals.