Protecting the Pedestrian at Street Intersections

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A comprehensive pedestrian program was started in South Bend in August of 1940, after a detailed survey of pedestrian problems and analysis of pedestrian accidents was presented to the City Traffic Commission* in the form of a report by the City Traffic Engineer. This report was entitled “The Pedestrian—South Bend’s Number One Problem in Traffic Safety.”

This report covered analysis of pedestrian fatalities over a period of six years, and analysis of other pedestrian-motor vehicle accidents over a two-year period. The report revealed that the pedestrian was the most frequent victim of motor-vehicle accidents in South Bend. During the period of 1934 to 1939, 53 percent of all persons killed and 48 percent of all persons injured in traffic accidents were pedestrians.

The survey and report gave the names of men, women, boys, and girls who were killed and injured in South Bend. It told also where, when, and, most important of all, why these accidents happened.

The Traffic Commission took immediate action and appointed various committees within the Commission to cope with the problem, and an organized engineering, education, and enforcement program was outlined and put into operation.

South Bend did not do anything out of the ordinary in the way of pedestrian safety activity. However, our pedestrian safety program was, and still is, based on facts and is continuous. The fact that our pedestrian program is not spasmodic is, in my opinion, the main reason for its success.

Among the many activities carried out during our pedestrian safety program, the following are worthy, I believe, of special mention. It is probable that no other newspaper in the country has devoted so much

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*The City Traffic Commission is a group of 21 men appointed by the Mayor to act in an advisory capacity on traffic safety matters. The membership is composed of city officials and civic leaders.
space to traffic safety as the South Bend Tribune, and certainly no other daily puts safety on the front page to the same extent. To give you some idea of the cooperation we received from the Tribune, a total of 37 full newspaper pages on traffic safety, a large share of which was devoted to the pedestrian, was published in the 12 months following the inauguration of our pedestrian program. These 37 full newspaper pages included 302 news articles, 113 features, 92 pictures, and 119 editorials. WSBT, the Tribune broadcasting station, produced 28 hours of safety programs, and broadcast 1,250 spot announcements on safety during this same 12-month period. Stationing of Boy Scouts in the central business area with posters informing motorists and pedestrians of one another's rights, sidewalk messages, concentration of police officers in the area to warn motorists and pedestrians of unsafe practices, and issuing of warning tickets are but a few worthy of mention.

Results Obtained

Results of continued pedestrian safety activity in South Bend are somewhat reflected in the obedience to signal indications in the central business section. In 1940 just before the launching of our pedestrian program 58.3 percent of all observed pedestrians crossed with the green light. In 1941, eight months after the pedestrian program was started, 79.2 percent walked with the green light. In 1945, 94.8 percent, and in 1946, just before the installation of our pedestrian "walk-wait" signals, 98.5 percent crossed with the green light.

The increase in pedestrian obedience to signals in 1941 over 1940 was brought about mainly through eight months of concentrated educational activity aimed particularly at the motorist. This included the stationing of police officers at the main intersections in the downtown district to insist that motorists turning right and left yield to pedestrians walking with the green light. This was done because analysis of our pedestrian accidents showed that more pedestrians were struck walking with the green light than when walking against it, and that the majority of pedestrians were struck by turning vehicles.

Before 1940 motorists did not yield to pedestrians at all when making turns. That obviously discouraged pedestrians from walking with the green light because they were usually blocked by turning vehicles. By 1941 the majority of motorists were yielding to pedestrians, and a substantial increase in pedestrian obedience (from 58.3 to 79.2 percent) was recorded. Today motorists yield nearly 100 percent.

In August, 1942, after 24 months of educational activity, the first pedestrian arrest was made for walking against a red light. This was a
test case. This was the only pedestrian arrest made in 1942 for crossing against a red light. In 1943, 198 pedestrian arrests were made for crossing against a red light. In 1944, 169 arrests were made and in 1945, the number was 27.

Elimination of jaywalking or crossing between street intersections was also included in our pedestrian program, and has shown similar results. For example, the worst mid-block crossing in our central area in 1940 showed 725 pedestrians per hour crossing mid-block across Michigan Street (U. S. 31) between Jefferson Boulevard and Wayne Street. Today the number is 13 per hour.

We now have pedestrian walk-wait signals at 17 intersections in our central business area. One month after the installation of the signals and before any arrests were made, voluntary obedience to the signal indications was 93.4 percent. Specifically 93.4 percent crossed with the walk-green indication, 5.1 percent with the wait-green indication and 1.5 percent with the wait-red indication. Our enforcement program started on the fifth week after installation of the pedestrian walk-wait signals, and we are confident that we will soon have as nearly 100 percent obedience to these signals as is possible.

Not only has pedestrian obedience to signals greatly improved and jaywalking decreased, but the pedestrian accident experience over this same period of continuous pedestrian safety activity has also shown a decided improvement. Pedestrian fatalities in the City of South Bend from 1934 to 1939 inclusive numbered 61 out of a total of 114 traffic fatalities in the city. This is 53 percent of the total. From 1940 to 1945 inclusive the number of pedestrian fatalities was 41 out of a total of 106 traffic fatalities in the city. This is only 39 percent of the total. These figures, six years after as compared to six years before, are very encouraging, and while we are not satisfied that a greater decrease cannot be made, we feel sure that the efforts put forth in our pedestrian program were well worthwhile.