

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY: A guide to applicable laws in Austin

Austin Pedestrian Advisory Council

Project Intention: The Pedestrian Advisory Council created this information leaflet on Pedestrian Crossing Rules & Regulations with input and advice from Austin Police Department and Austin Transportation Department, but is not officially adopted or endorsed by City Council or any City Departments. Its intention is to raise awareness and understanding of traffic rules and laws as they apply in Austin, to every driver, cyclist, and pedestrian.

Who are pedestrians?

- Pedestrians are the most vulnerable of all road users.
- Pedestrians include people traveling by foot, wheelchair, skateboard or similar means.
- Pedestrians include those walking to or from their car, for work, home, recreation or any purpose.
- Pedestrians include people of all ages (from under 8 years old to over 80 years) and of all abilities.

The scope of this project is to focus on pedestrians traveling to and from destination, rather than drivers of broken down vehicles or those placed in prohibited areas due to a crash or other incident.

In order to achieve effective solutions in our continuing traffic safety efforts we need to tackle education and interpretation so all users have a good understanding of rules and regulations. Links for reference:

- [Pedestrian Advisory Council Webpage (contains further discussion on this issue)]
- [Vision Zero webpage]
- [Americawalks.org]

ISSUE 1: YIELD TO PEDESTRIANS IN A CROSSWALK

Vehicle operators **MUST** yield to pedestrians within a crosswalk. This applies at ALL crosswalks that are marked, unmarked, at intersections, or mid-block.

- **Yield to Pedestrians:** At a signalized intersection vehicle operators must yield when a pedestrian is crossing during the “walk” phase.
- **Don’t Cut it Close:** At a marked or unmarked crosswalk vehicle operators must yield when the pedestrian is on the half of the roadway in which the vehicle is traveling; or approaching so closely from the opposite half of the roadway as to be in danger. In all cases including free right turns.
- **Allow a Safe Space:** Vehicle operators stopping at an intersection should not block the crosswalk.
- **Wait Until It’s Safe:** A pedestrian with a “Walk” signal may proceed across a roadway... vehicles shall yield the right-of-way to the pedestrian, for as long as it takes them to complete their crossing.

- **Follow Others Actions:** If another vehicle is stopped at a crosswalk to permit a pedestrian to cross a roadway you must also stop.

Reference: Sec. 552.003. PEDESTRIAN RIGHT-OF-WAY AT CROSSWALK.

ISSUE 2: WHAT IS AN 'UNMARKED CROSSWALK'?

An unmarked (or implied) crosswalk is the continuation of the lines of a sidewalk across an intersection even if they are not painted on the road. They even exist where there is no built sidewalk as a continuation of the property line. They have the same rules as a marked crosswalk.



At all four-way intersections crosswalks exist on all four streets meeting the intersection. Where these are not marked or painted on the road 'unmarked crosswalks' still exist (as highlighted by the arrows in the example above).

Note: At 'T' intersections unmarked crosswalks are not universally considered to apply on the through street. For safety, we recommend that pedestrians assume they do NOT have the right of way (i.e. that drivers and bicyclists are NOT required to yield to them) when crossing the through street at 'T' intersections.

Reference: TTC Sec. 541.302. TRAFFIC AREAS.

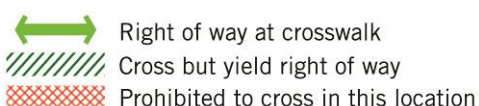
ISSUE 3: OTHER CROSSING PLACES

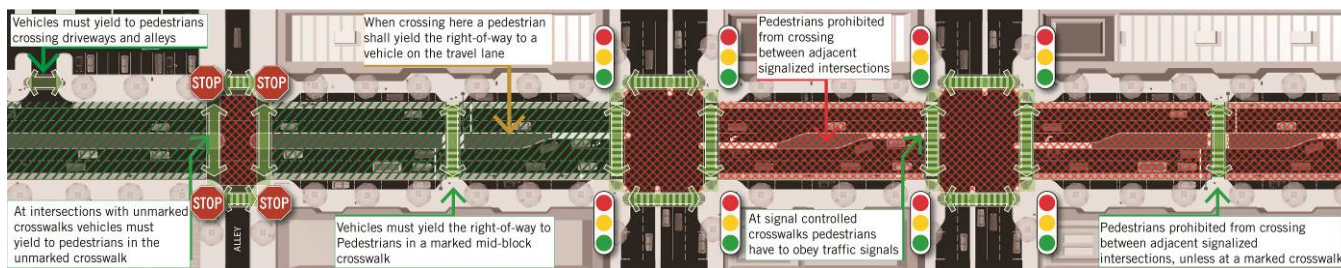
On most streets in Austin pedestrians are allowed to cross the road at locations other than at a crosswalk, providing they:

1. yield the right of way to vehicles;
2. are not between adjacent signalized intersections (i.e. ones with traffic lights);
3. are not on an access-controlled road; and,
4. are not specifically prohibited to cross by signage.

Crossing fast or wide roads outside of a crosswalk is generally less safe and should be avoided.

Reference: Sec. 552.005. CROSSING AT POINT OTHER THAN CROSSWALK.





[The above diagram relates to Issues 1-3.]

ISSUE 4: DRIVERS EMERGING FROM AN ALLEY, DRIVEWAY, OR BUILDING MUST YIELD TO PEDESTRIANS

The sidewalk continues over private driveways, alleys, building entrances: this ‘sidewalk area’ applies to all streets and the same regulations apply as a regular concrete sidewalk. When crossing a sidewalk or sidewalk area, vehicle operators must:

- Stop the vehicle before moving on a sidewalk or the sidewalk area extending across an alley or driveway; and,
- Yield the right-of-way to pedestrians to avoid collision.

Reference: Sec. 545.256. EMERGING FROM AN ALLEY, DRIVEWAY, OR BUILDING.

ISSUE 5: PEDESTRIANS: DON’T BE ACCUSED OF “DARTING OUT”:

- Pedestrians may not suddenly leave a curb or other place of safety and proceed into a crosswalk in the path of a vehicle so close that it is impossible for the vehicle operator to yield.
- Pedestrian must not START to cross when the ‘upraised hand’ signal is shown (either flashing or steady) even if this accompanied with a countdown timer.

Reference: Sec. 552.003. PEDESTRIAN RIGHT-OF-WAY AT CROSSWALK.

ISSUE 6: CROSSING SOME ROADS IN AUSTIN IS PROHIBITED

A pedestrian may not cross the following Austin roadways, except on an overpass or underpass that crosses the roadway:

- IH-35; and Loop 1 (MoPac Expressway);
- U.S. Highway 290 (East) from IH-35 to the east city limits; and,
- U.S. Highway 183 (Ed Bluestein Boulevard) from U.S. Highway 290 (East) to Farm Road 969 (Webberville Road).

This City ordinance does not include several freeways which have been constructed in Austin recently. **It is unsafe to attempt to cross any controlled access roadway or freeway on foot.**

Reference: § 12-1-26 PEDESTRIANS ON CERTAIN ROADWAYS

ISSUE 7: USE THE SIDEWALK,

- A sidewalk is a pedestrian route running parallel to the roadway. It is typically a concrete path but this is not a requirement, and it may be a gravel or even just grass.

- A pedestrian must use the sidewalk if one is provided and if it is accessible to the pedestrian.
- If a sidewalk is not provided or is not accessible, a pedestrian walking on the roadway should, if possible, walk facing the traffic (in the continental U.S. this is on the left side of the roadway). If the only option is a bike lane, it may be used by the pedestrian.

Note: A sidewalk that is 'accessible' to some pedestrians (healthy, relatively young, able-bodied, etc.) may not be accessible to others (blind, wheel-chair bound, using a walker, etc.), so while one pedestrian may be required to use the sidewalk, another pedestrian in the same location may legally stay in the street, facing traffic.

Reference: Texas Transportation Code, Title 7, Sec. 552.006. USE OF SIDEWALK. (a)

General Advice: AVOID DISTRACTIONS

Whether vehicle operator, cyclist, or pedestrian it is common sense to pay full attention (avoid distractions) and be aware of other road uses whenever you are using the street.

“Travel Friendly”: Make eye contact and communicate politely with other road users where possible.