Archived Document

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The content is historical and may be out of date. It does not reflect current City policy, programs or data.

Vision Zero SF has been replaced by the City's Street Safety Initiative. For current information, visit the San Francisco Street Safety Initiative webpage.

The SFMTA's terms of use are at the SFMTA terms webpage.

Safety—It's Your Turn Press Kit

Logos for Vision Zero SF Left Turns

Click here for logos

Eight "micro behaviors" that are factors in making unsafe left-hand turns:

1. Cutting the Corner

Drivers should enter the intersection straight-on, complete a 90-degree left turn, then exit the intersection straight-on. However, many initiate the turn too early and turn gradually, traversing the intersection and crosswalks at an oblique angle that gives less time to watch for pedestrians and cyclists and increases the exposure of pedestrians in the crosswalk to a collision.

2. Speeding

When making a left turn, drivers should slow their speed significantly compared with driving straight through a green light. However, many drivers either maintain their speed or slow down only slightly, raising the risk of collision with a pedestrian or cyclist.

3. Shooting the Gap

When making a left turn through oncoming traffic, drivers should only take the turn when they have enough time to pass through traffic at a safe speed. Instead, drivers often try to turn through a brief gap in traffic that forces them to accelerate significantly or leaves them insufficient time to check for pedestrians and cyclists before completing the turn.

4. Looking Only for Vehicles

Drivers are expected to check for pedestrians and cyclists and confirm they have a clear path before completing a left turn. However, they often fail to do so, or complete only a partial check (e.g., pedestrians but not cyclists).

5. Following the Leader:

Drivers rely on cues from vehicles around them. This leads many to make a turn in the same manner as the car ahead of them instead of actively assessing whether new pedestrians and/or cyclists have entered or are about to enter the intersection in a manner that would require them to turn differently.

6. Aggressive Responses to Yellow Lights

When drivers encounter a yellow traffic light, their proper response should be to take a turn only if they can safely exit the intersection before a red light. Instead, drivers often respond to yellow lights with unsafe left turn behaviors like speeding, cutting the corner, or failing to check for pedestrians.

7. Distracted Driving

Drivers pay more attention to phones and other distractions than the intersection even as they should be devoting 100% of their attention towards their driving environment during complex activities like making a left turn.

8. The Swing-Around

In a multi-lane intersection, if multiple drivers are turning left, each should have a clear origin lane and destination lane. Instead, one driver may "pop out" of her lane and pass another on the right while both are making left turns.

From Behavioral Insights for Safer Left Turns: Target + Explore, A Report from the Behavioral Insights Team, Jacob Appel and Siddharth Mandava, September, 2018

Left-Turn Traffic Calming Project FAQ

What is a Left-Turn Traffic Calming Project?

A left turn calming project involves placing physical traffic calming devices such as painted safety zones, delineators, and left-turn guide bumps at street intersections in order to reduce the speed at which a car can make a left turn and prompt drivers to make slower turns so that they can more easily see pedestrians, bicyclists, and other road users.

Where are the project intersections?

The Left-Turn Traffic Calming Projects are installed at the following intersections:

- 10th St./Folsom
- Gough/Sacramento
- Leavenworth/Sutter
- Ellis/Leavenworth
- Broadway/Montgomery
- 17th Ave./Lincoln
- 18th Ave./Lincoln

Why don't I have one in my neighborhood?

These initial test intersections were chosen based on several criteria, including location along the High Injury Network, Community of Concern, and street typology. SFMTA and DPH will be evaluating the Left-Turn Traffic Calming Projects and making recommendations for citywide effectiveness next summer.

What is the Safety—It's Your Turn education campaign?

This traffic safety education campaign is a tool designed to raise awareness about the dangers of unsafe left turns, to promote safer driving behavior, and to encourage walking and biking. The Safety It's Your Turn education campaign launched in October 2020 with targeted outreach around Left-Turn Traffic Calming Projects. The citywide campaign will launch in January 2021 and will be supported by these community grants.

What is Vision Zero?

Vision Zero SF is the city's commitment to eliminating traffic fatalities by building better and safer streets, educating the public on traffic safety, enforcing traffic laws, and adopting policy changes that save lives.

Why are left turns dangerous?

Every year in San Francisco, about 30 people lose their lives and over 500 more are severely injured while traveling on city streets. Left turns have been identified as one of the top three crash factors for severe and fatal collisions with people walking and biking in San Francisco. In 2019, almost 40% of traffic fatalities involved a left-turning vehicle.