

Crosswalks on Oregon State Highways

Pedestrian safety is the primary reason we are required to do an investigation before recommending approval or disapproval of a marked crosswalk. I would like to take a few minutes and explain the processes, reasoning, and criteria, and how they pertain to installing crosswalk markings on our state highways.

I should explain first, however, the difference between marked and unmarked crosswalks. As described in Oregon law (ORS 801.220), **every intersection has at least one crosswalk, whether it is marked or not.**

Many people assume the purpose of marking a crosswalk is to make the crosswalk more visible to the driver. That is not the case, as most crosswalk markings are not visible until the vehicle is very close to them. The real purpose of markings is to guide the pedestrian in the proper path, and to encourage them to cross at preferred (safer) locations. To the limited extent marked crosswalks *are* visible to drivers, a driver who passes over crosswalks marked at every intersection or a location that rarely has pedestrians may be conditioned to not expect pedestrians and thus loses respect for crosswalk markings. Signalized intersections are the safest option for locating marked crosswalks, so it is our policy to always mark those crosswalks. ODOT generally discourages marking crosswalks at uncontrolled intersections (ones with no signal or STOP sign for traffic on the state highway). We do occasionally approve crosswalk markings at those locations, but only sparingly, and only after an investigation (mentioned above). Marking a crosswalk at an inappropriate location may in fact put a pedestrian more at risk than if it were not marked at all, as it may give the pedestrian a false sense of security. Conversely, when pedestrians cross at an unmarked location, they have a tendency to be more watchful for hazards. Our decision on whether to mark a crosswalk has to be guided by other specific safety criteria as well (crossing distance, posted speed, traffic volume, crash history, geometry, sight distance, availability of and distance from other crossing locations, appurtenances, etc.).

Occasionally we will receive a request for a marked crosswalk at an uncontrolled intersection on a state highway in which the requestor gives as a justification that without one, conditions are not safe for pedestrians. Such reasoning is often precisely why the location should NOT be marked. If a given location is unsafe with an unmarked crosswalk, it will probably be less so with a marked one. Again, the purpose of markings is to encourage pedestrians to cross at safer locations.