SUN CITY WEST
INDEPENDENT

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MCDOT installs HAWK Pedestrian Crosswalks in Sun City West

SUN CITY WEST, Ariz. - The Maricopa County Department of Transportation has recently completed construction associated with the installation of three signalized pedestrian crosswalks.

The new pedestrian crossings, located on Camino Del Sol at 138th Avenue, on 138th Avenue at R.H. Johnson Boulevard and on Granite Valley Drive at Mantor Lane in the vicinity of the Banner Del E. Webb Medical Center campus, include a HAWK (High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk) traffic signal that resembles a traditional traffic signal light, but combines special features to help make crosswalks on busy streets safer.

“Compared with a standard traffic signal, the HAWK pedestrian signal provides faster service to pedestrians and less delay to motorists,” said Steve Poole, MCDOT traffic signal manager. “Pedestrian safety is at the heart of the HAWK.” It combines special features such as adjusted settings for slower paced individuals and push-button activation. The new HAWK signal also emits an audible tone for sight-impaired pedestrians indicating when it’s safe to cross the roadway.

The HAWK signal will only light when activated by a pedestrian who wants to cross the roadway. When the crosswalk button is pressed, approaching drivers will see flashing yellow lights for a few seconds, indicating they should reduce speed and be prepared to stop for a pedestrian in the crosswalk.

The flashing yellow signal lights will change to solid yellow lights for a brief period and then turn to solid red, indicating drivers must stop and pedestrians may now proceed through the crosswalk.

“The HAWK is specially designed to enhance safety for both motorists and pedestrians,” said Mr. Poole. “Unlike a standard signalized intersection with a traffic light facing all four directions, a HAWK pedestrian signal only faces traffic crossing the crosswalk and does not have any traffic signals facing side streets. Any side street that is controlled by a stop sign will continue to be controlled by a stop sign when a HAWK signal is in place.”

There are other differences in HAWK signal operation that motorist should be aware of said Mr. Poole. “Unlike a standard traffic light, traffic will only be stopped when the push-button is activated and a pedestrian is present. Additionally, a HAWK signal will always display a flashing yellow light and then a solid yellow light just prior to turning red, but with a standard traffic signal, a flashing yellow light simply means drivers may proceed with caution. With a HAWK signal, drivers are also allowed to proceed on the flashing red after pedestrians have crossed their half of the roadway,” he said.

Another significant difference between a standard traffic light and a HAWK signal is that Arizona traffic law states that motorists are to treat an inoperative traffic signal as a four-way stop, yet an inactive HAWK signal is the exception to the rule. Drivers are not required to stop at a “dark” HAWK signal that’s not in activation mode.

MCDOT is launching an educational outreach campaign in coordination with the installation of the new HAWK signals in Sun City West to educate both motorists and pedestrian users about the differences in operation and traffic laws as they apply to a standard traffic light or the new pedestrian HAWK signal.

MCDOT worked closely with PORA representatives and the Banner Del E. Webb Medical Center during the planning and design process.

“This is an example of MCDOT’s responsiveness to meeting our constituents’ needs,” said Clint Hickman, Maricopa County Board of Supervisors. “By working collaboratively with community partners during the design phase of the project, MCDOT was able to develop a comprehensive solution that will increase safety for pedestrians and motorists on these busy streets and within the Del Webb medical campus.”

Federal Highway Administration studies have found that HAWK signals help pedestrians to be more visible to motorists and have been effective at reducing pedestrian-related crashes by alerting drivers to the presence of crosswalks on roadways. Additionally, safety studies from the city of Tucson in 2010 show HAWK signal sites experienced a large decrease of 86 percent in the pedestrian intersection related crash rate after installation.