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Subject: S. Park Street fatality / RRFB report card
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Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs)

Are [RRFBs](#) safe? Madison has over 114 of these activatable lights at bike/ped crossings. They're inexpensive to install and work *most* of the time, but they also bring legal ambiguities, usage misunderstandings, and a false sense of security that directly contributes to tragedies like the February 2026 pedestrian fatality on S. Park St. The installation of RRFB's on busy six lane roads like Packers Ave and University Ave suggests the City may be expecting too much of RRFB technology.

A [2016 Texas A&M study](#) cited by the [Federal Highway Administration](#) found driver compliance at RRFBs ranges from 19 to 98%. Can you imagine if stoplights had such a wide range of driver compliance? The study discusses the difficulty of quantifying the driver's "**attitude toward the function of the roadway.**" E.g., why does the RRFB crossing at Monroe St and Edgewood Ave have three injuries in five years, while the nearly identical RRF crossing (vehicle & ped counts, crossing guard, etc) at Mineral Point Rd and Owen Dr has zero?

I ask City of Madison to do three things:

1.

Develop a safety report card for all City RRFBs on streets with three or more travel lanes. This report should measure pedestrian volume, pedestrian stress, RRFB activation rate at different times of the day. It should measure driver compliance with decoys and should note obvious external factors such as visibility limitations and the presence of crossing guards. Finally, each report card should review crash histories before and after the RRFB installation.

2.

Use that safety report to develop RRFB standards for multi-lane roads. E.g., appropriateness based on number of lanes, speed limit, and traffic & ped volumes, as well as recommendations for additional safety treatments such as signage, lighting, visibility, raised crossings, curb bumpouts, rumble strips, median sizes, pavement paint, traffic camera coverage, etc.

3.

Sue WisDOT over their [Guide for Street / Path Crossings](#) published in summer 2021 because it contradicts the safe and normal operation of RRFB's. That guide states that drivers need only yield to a pedestrian who has stepped off the curb and into the

roadway. It's not enough to have activated an RRFB. Prior to 2021, [WisDOT's guidance](#) had been to "*communicate your intention to cross to approaching drivers and expect them (but wait for them) to yield / stop.*" The new guide makes no mention of communicating intent. The new guide is inconsistent with state law, incompatible with RRFBs, and dangerous for pedestrians.

Separately, Madison should continue to work with the State Legislature and WisDOT on Madison's traffic safety priorities:

- a. Improve driver's education coverage of crosswalks, pedestrians, and bicyclists.
- b. Enhance penalties for crossing violations. Today, RRFBs are legally no different from any other [marked or unmarked crossing](#), and violators don't even receive demerits.
- c. Let Madison assume local authority over State Highway 151
- d. Expand the [Safe Roads Save Lives Act](#) to allow Madison to deploy traffic safety cameras.

RRFBs are an important but flawed tool in the traffic engineer's toolbox. Madison needs evidence-based guidelines for where RRFBs should and *should not* be deployed.

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