



# THE CROSSINGS

A guide to street performances to  
create a city that SEES and STOPS  
for pedestrians.

## SUMMARY

While working on a larger project called *Islands of Milwaukee* ([www.islandsofmilwaukee.org](http://www.islandsofmilwaukee.org)), our team did “ride-alongs” with Home Delivered Meal drivers. It was a common experience to deliver meals to apartment buildings that were across the street from a grocery store or restaurant. However, the street was so busy and so dangerous, it was clearly impassable for older adults even without disabilities. This observation made clear that social isolation and ill health is directly related to our urban design.

The idea for the Crossings was born.

The Crossings are street performances aimed at creating cities that SEE and STOP for pedestrians.

**This guide is meant to get you started — please contact us for additional consulting to realize your own project, at [islandsofmilwaukee@gmail.com](mailto:islandsofmilwaukee@gmail.com).**

## WHY?

Research tells us that walkable cities are safer and healthier cities. To ensure their health and safety, cities should be eager to invite more walking, not less. But the majority of cities have ceded control of the streets to cars. Suburban and exurban communities are explicitly designed for cars, from giant box store parking lots to 8 lane intersections. Streets are designed as mini-highways. Lights are short, so as not to inconvenience the cars. Police lack the resources to consistently enforce speed limits and laws pertaining to pedestrians and bikes. When a pedestrian is killed we are saddened, but rarely think that any change in driver behavior is possible to avoid future fatalities.

**Change is possible.**



**MKE  
SEES  
AND  
STOPS**

## HOW?

How can we begin to shift these relationships of road use? Bike and pedestrian advocates refer to the 5 “e”s needed to change the abusive relationship between drivers and pedestrians. They are:

- enforcement
- engineering
- education
- encouragement
- evaluation

The Crossings endeavors to address education and encouragement - to inform and incentivize drivers to change the culture of their road use. Without cultural efforts, engineering and enforcement will not be effective. To truly improve the walkability of cities, all 5 ‘e’s need to happen simultaneously.

We draw on the work of David Engwicht, who advises using “humor, intrigue and uncertainty” to appeal to the human being inside the driver. If a driver thinks “hmmm, what’s going on here?” he will slow down. And slowing down, even just a little, can make the difference between life and death for pedestrians.

## WHO?

The Crossings was a collaboration between Sojourn Theatre, UWM’s Department of Theatre, and Southshore Connecting Caring Communities. Together we planned, designed, and performed 3 Crossings at intersections in 3 different municipalities. The performances were listed on the theatre season of the UWM Department of Theatre — coordinated by Anne Basting, and featured 8 UWM students in the cast along with 2 Sojourn performers, in collaboration with Sojourn designer Shannon Scrofano and director Maureen Towey.



## CONSIDER THE FACTS.

- In 2012, 4,743 pedestrians died in traffic crashes, a 6% increase from the number reported in 2011.
- 76,000 pedestrians were injured in traffic crashes in 2012.
- Older adults and children are the most vulnerable pedestrians, yet added safety measures target only children (school zones etc.).
- In 2012, nearly 1/5th of all pedestrian fatalities were hit and run.
- In 2012, 11 pedestrians were killed in traffic crashes in Wisconsin.
- Obesity and overweight status increased across all levels of socio-economic status in Milwaukee County between 2011 and 2012.
- One hundred years ago, 2 out of every 10 people lived in an urban area. As of 2010, more than half of all people live in urban areas. By 2030, 6 out of every 10 people will live in a city, and by 2050, this proportion will increase to 7 out of 10 people.
- Cities will need to be redesigned to be walkable communities to address increased population, congestion, and health needs.

### SOURCES

U.S. Dept. of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Safety Facts - Pedestrians 2012 <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811888.pdf>

2012 Milwaukee Health Report <http://www.cuph.org/mhr/2012-milwaukee-health-report.pdf>

[http://www.who.int/gho/urban\\_health/situation\\_trends/urban\\_population\\_growth\\_text/en/](http://www.who.int/gho/urban_health/situation_trends/urban_population_growth_text/en/)

Engwicht, David. Mental Speed Bumps. 2005. Annandale, NSW Australia: Envirobook.

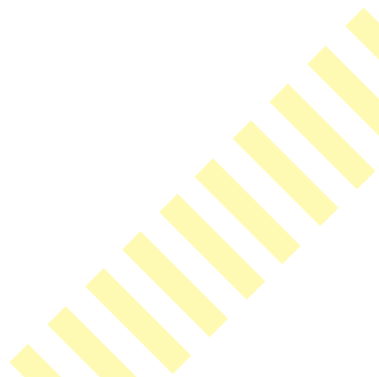
## WHICH PARTNERSHIPS SHOULD WE FORM?

Partnerships were crucial to the planning and performance of the Crossings.

Here are our partners:

- A **neighborhood advocacy group** (SouthShore Connecting Caring Communities) who knows all the local players and who would continue to advocate for changes after the performances.
- Sojourn Theatre, a professional theatre company with experience doing street performance, was a core partner. We suggest inviting an **arts organization** to partner with you to help with the design and creation of your visual and performative elements.
- The University of Wisconsin Milwaukee was a core partner, providing student performers, artists, and volunteers. We suggest you consider partnering with a **school or university** to engage young people in your Crossing. Streets need to be accessible for people of all ages in the neighborhood, and children and older adults are the most vulnerable pedestrians.
- The Wisconsin Bike Federation was a valuable partner. They provided the latest information on local laws and supplemental educational materials for empowered pedestrians. We recommend partnering with an **organization committed to bike/pedestrian rights**.
- The health of a community is linked to its walkability. Forming a partnership with an **area clinic or health center** gives your Crossings a positive message - instead of being “against driver behavior,” your Crossing will be advocating “for the health of the city.”

Our partners spread the word about the event, attended the event, and helped to gain support and resources on our behalf. Your advocates will be different in each neighborhood. Determine which partners will be the most supportive for your Crossing.







(above) Debby Pizur of SouthShore Connecting Caring Communities, John Hohenfeldt, Mayor of Cudahy, WI, and Anne Basting of UWM's Dept of Theatre. (below) Older residents submit cards to the Islands of Milwaukee project sharing answers to the question - Is there an intersection you would like to cross on foot, but feel it is too dangerous?

# ISLANDS<sup>of</sup> MILWAUKEE

## QUESTION OF THE DAY

Share your response by text or phone at **414-678-1653**.  
or write your answer below, and return it to your driver/volunteer.

=====

*North Avenue, Lisbon, & 47th St.  
It is so bad that no one ever crosses*

[WWW.ISLANDSOFMILWAUKEE.ORG](http://WWW.ISLANDSOFMILWAUKEE.ORG)



## WHAT BASIC RESEARCH/DATA WILL WE NEED?

**Talk with area residents.** Southshore Connecting Caring Communities held focus groups at area senior meal sites and centers. Try connecting with Neighborhood Watch groups, parent/teacher organizations, and dropping into neighborhood gathering spots (barber shops, nail salons, coffee shops). Document their actual words and statements on the subject. Discover new groups and partnerships beyond your core team.

**Assess the intersections in your neighborhood.** Document the timing of lights and the distance of the intersections. There should be a minimum of 1 second of light for 2 feet of distance. Check out the intersection at various times of day — rush hours, twilight, lunch hour. Where is the pressure on the intersection at different times of day? Is the signage adequate?

We also **distributed a card** that asked “Is there an intersection you would like to cross on foot but feel it is too dangerous?” We received hundreds of responses, some of which said “I don’t cross anymore - it’s too dangerous.” The visuals of these cards - and their sheer numbers - are a clear depiction of how we’ve given up walking, or ceded the roads to the cars.

Ask the city for reports on which intersections are “**crash density zones**” - where there are frequent crashes. Some intersections that people reported wanting to cross were not crash density zones. This again is a clear indication that people *want* to cross, but don’t dare because it is too dangerous. Pedestrians have given up and accepted a limitation on their mobility instead of risking their lives.

## OF POLICE AND PERMITS

Start with the Community Liaison, and seek buy-in from as high in the command as possible. Describe the project using the language of **education, public safety and community connection** rather than street protest or direct action.

St. Francis Police joined us for the Crossings to control the right turn at the intersection. We were thankful, as cars were routinely ignoring us and turning right without stopping.

Police will ask you if you have a **permit** for your event. Explain to them that you plan to cross within the timing of the lights and will not inhibit traffic flow, nor permanently block the sidewalk. Technically, you should not need a permit for this event. As the person at City Hall said to us, “It’s your God-given right to cross the street!”

We *did* elect to get a permit (a “special, no-fee permit”) for our crossing in Milwaukee. A permit is circulated to police so they are aware of what is happening at your event. This is a good thing - as we discovered in Cudahy - when drivers called the police on us. The police came to the intersection to tell us they knew what we were doing and were supportive - but wanted us to know that drivers were calling them.

In St. Francis, an officer came to the Crossing to ask how he could be helpful to us. At first we were reluctant, hoping to prove our point by crossing within the timing of the lights on our own. But it became clear that the cars turning right (illegally) wouldn’t stop even with a “boat” and more than 10 older adults in walkers in the crosswalk. The officer controlled the right turn lane and ensured our safety.





(above) St. Francis Police joined us for the Crossings to control the right turn at the intersection. We were thankful, as cars were routinely ignoring us and turning right without stopping. (below) A sign indicates to drivers that they are approaching a performance.



## WHAT IS THE STORY OF THE CROSSINGS? AND WHY?

The Crossings are an attempt to educate and encourage drivers to see and stop for pedestrians. Drivers are on “auto-pilot” - the vast majority assume they have right of way in the roads at all times. We can appeal to the human inside the driver with humor, intrigue, and uncertainty. “What’s going on here?” he might say to himself. “Why is there a ship crossing the street?” The goal is to slow them down long enough for the message to sink in.

The story that the Crossings tell is drawn from an existing narrative in Milwaukee. At downtown bridges, when the guard rails go down, cars *must stop*. Then the bridge goes up and the boat goes through. When the bridge goes down and the rails go up, the cars are free *to go*. We draw on the clarity of that example to remind drivers that when a pedestrian is crossing at an intersection, they *must stop*.

There might be another story that your neighborhood group would like to tell. There are lots of possible stories to tell with your Crossing. Whatever story you tell, we strongly suggest infusing humor in your message. Drivers are already very aggressive. Adding a layer of angry protest will encourage more angry responses from drivers and jeopardize the safety of your Crossings team.





*(above) The crossing at Logan, Russell and Kinnickinnic included residents, students, city and state officials, University leadership, and representatives from our partner organizations. (below) First mate Malkia Stampley with a passenger on the ship.*



## HOW TO MAKE IT FUN

The people you invite to volunteer and to cross with you should have a great time. This should be an event participants want to do every year. To accomplish this, we carried our story through every aspect of the Crossings.

### Music

Because of our theme, we played sailing related songs through a megaphone, including the Theme from The Love Boat; Bobby Darin's Beyond the Sea; the Irish sea shanty Bold Riley; Harry Belafonte singing the Jamaica Farewell; and even Styx's Sail Away.

### Playful Roles

We identified a Captain, First Mate, and Yeoman for the ship, each of whom wore a ship captain hat that we bought at a costume/party store.

### Signage

We printed sturdy 2'x3' signs to warn drivers that there was a performance coming. The signs read "AHOY! PERFORMANCE AHEAD!"

### Be a Host

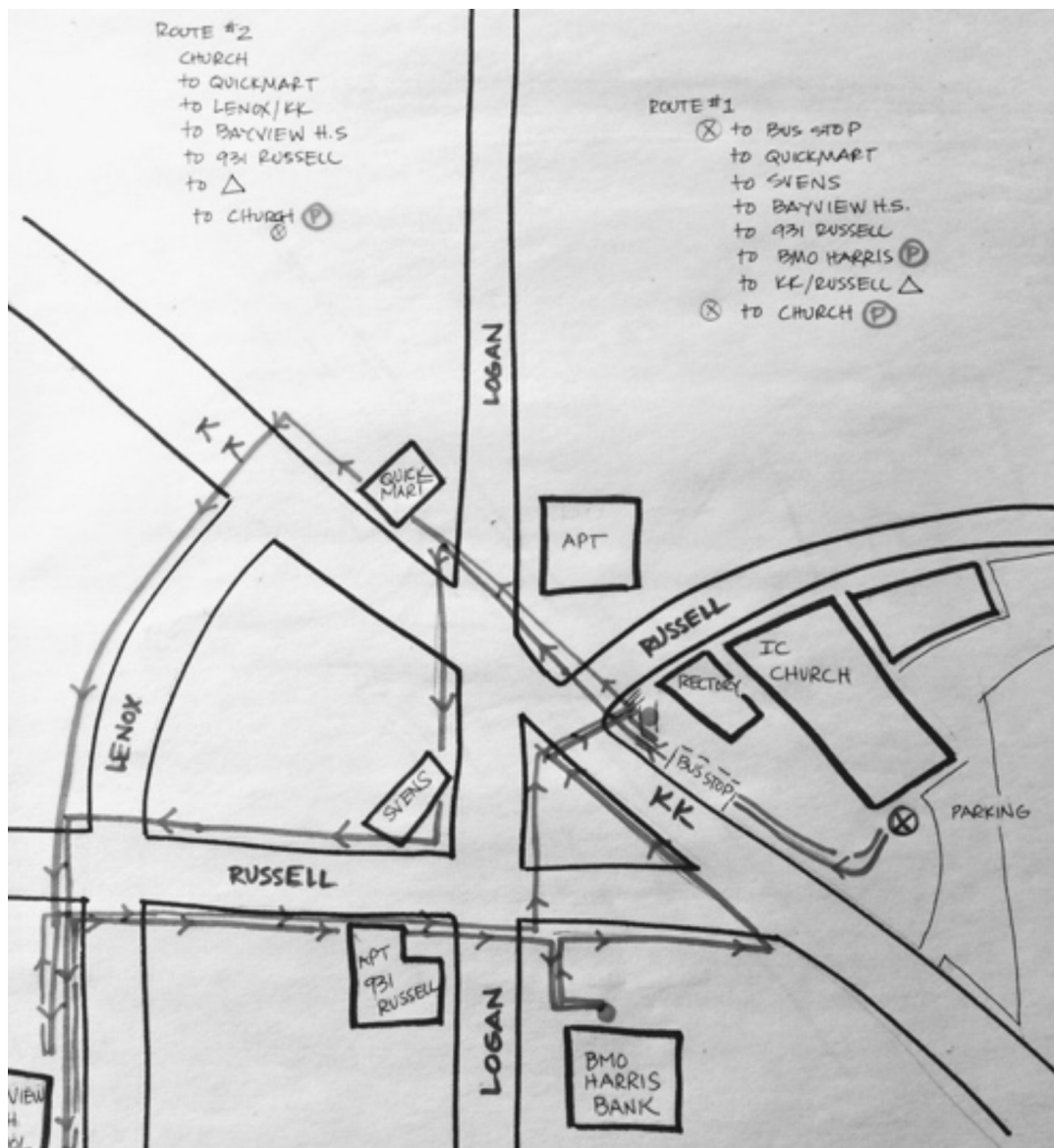
Be sure to welcome and thank everyone who joins you for the Crossings. They should feel like special guests. We had our "Captain" welcome them aboard the good ship Awareness and stationed them between the two large mast sails. Performers on our team were instructed to talk with passengers, asking them about their experiences crossing the street and inviting them to talk with some of the invited civic officials.







(above) Civic officials with the Captain and crew, including the mayor of Milwaukee. (below) Working out the route through sketches.



## HOW TO MAP OUT A ROUTE

We drew pictures of each intersection we selected for a Crossing, complete with area businesses, crossing distances, duration of lights, etc. **We identified an initial gathering point that we called the Port.** Ports can be churches or apartment buildings where you can gather outside or inside (in case of rain).

**We also identified a route** that we would take around the intersection. You might elect to walk around the square of a traditional intersection. You might also expand your route to walk down the street to local businesses to engage them in your performance. The route should be flexible so that you can adjust in the moment to unforeseen changes like weather, hostile drivers, police presence, or large groups of people joining you.

We identified a location for a **Highlight Moment** when we would stop and do a brief performance (script is available in this packet) and when local officials could step forward to share their reactions.

## WHOM MIGHT WE INVITE?

We spent 6-7 months doing community outreach in support of the Crossings. We contacted senior apartment buildings, schools, churches and businesses around the intersections. We offered workshops on how to be empowered pedestrians called “How to Stop Traffic.”

**We created posters that invited people to join us for the Crossings.** We asked that people “reserve a spot” by calling or emailing. It is crucial to know approximately how many will join you, as you can’t cross with more than 10 people at a time and still make it within the natural timing of the lights.

**We invited civic officials for each Crossing, at the city, county and state level.** Nearly everyone we invited joined us! It is clearly a positive way to be seen engaging in one’s jurisdiction.

**We invited press - television, print, and radio.** We also hired our own local video/sound team to ensure that we got coverage and that civic officials had someone to talk to.



## HOW SHOULD WE STRUCTURE THE CROSSINGS?

We made a 2-hour window. It could also be done in a 1-hour window. There are countless variations on this plan.

- 15 minutes > Assemble at the “port”, welcome, and instruct the passengers how the Crossings will work.
- 5 minutes > A sample “walk” together toward the intersection.
- 20 minutes > A walk across the intersection (crossing all four directions and back to the original point of departure).
- 10 minutes > A “Highlight Moment” when you address the group about the main issues and actions, and invite civic officials to comment.
- 20 minutes > One more tour around the intersection.
- 5 minutes > A final thank you to all who gathered.
- 5 minutes > Walk back to the “port” or original meeting place.

**Remember, crossing the street is dangerous.** All decisions are made to ensure the safety of the people you are crossing with. **The “Captain” or leader should have a megaphone.** This enables everyone to hear should he/she need to issue warnings.

We used **2 pieces of 10 foot pvc pipe as “guard rails”**. We had two teams of a “Rail”, a “sign carrier,” and a person with a triangle. The first team high stepped quickly into the intersection, bringing the rail down, ringing the triangle, and holding the sign up to drivers. This advance team effectively blocked right-hand turning vehicles that might otherwise have tried to turn into the intersection in advance of the pedestrians. The second team stayed back and blocked the left-hand turning vehicles from entering the cross-walk. After the boat and the people aboard crossed, the second rail team high-stepped quickly across the walk, trying to leave enough time to allow left-hand turns. [See video for details.] We crossed with **no more than 10 passengers each time**. If you have more people assembled to cross with you, have them wait at the “embarkment point,” cheer, wish you bon voyage. After the boat makes one round around the intersection, the passengers disembark and new passengers can board.

A “First Mate” is positioned at the front of the Crossing to anticipate any issues at the front of the Crossing. A final sail holder is the last person across in the boat. This person can hold passengers back if it is clear that they can’t make it across in time.

## STORIES FROM THE CROSSINGS

We stationed volunteers at the intersections to hand out programs and answer questions. Volunteers also held signs to warn drivers that there was a performance ahead. Volunteers reported that about 75% of feedback from drivers was “thumbs up” with supportive waves and horn honks. About 25% was aggressive - this might mean revving of engines, obscene gestures, or nasty comments. This differed by intersection, with Packard and Ramsey reporting a much higher negative response. That said, the guys who worked at the Lube & Oil shop at the corner of Packard and Ramsey bought and presented us with two huge packages of cookies.

### LOU

We “rehearsed” the Crossings by visiting the intersections and crossing to get the timings of the lights, assess driver behavior, and form relationships with those using the intersection. At one rehearsal at St. Francis and KK, we met Lou, who watched us carefully. I asked her if she wanted to cross with us. “Oh no. I don’t cross when there are any cars at all. It’s too dangerous,” she said. Lou said that on the day of the Crossings, she had to take the bus to the doctor’s office. We told her we’d walk her across the street.

On the day of the Crossings, we saw Lou as she prepared to head to the bus stop. But she waved us off. Instead of walking to the corner and crossing with us (about 100 yards), she waited for the cars to clear and walked directly across the street to the bus stop. Lou made it clear to everyone present what should have been obvious. Crossing at the corner is both too far and too dangerous for the older residents. The bus stop is directly across the street from the senior apartment building’s front door. They need a mid-street cross walk to avoid the erratic right and left turns at the intersection. With two schools also bordering the intersection, this mid-street cross would also benefit them. The Crossing Guard told us that she sometimes has to call the police to help her because the cars turn right at the intersection without looking for children - even with all the signage and a Crossing Guard present. Lou had found the best solution - we only needed to listen and watch. This kind of a change in engineering of the street will demand funds, which means that it will take constant follow up from the neighborhood to advocate for it.

## THE MAYOR OF CUDAHY

Mayor John, as he is known, was eager and ready to cross with us at Packard and Ramsey. A large group walked the 200 yards up to the corner, careful to wait for Nancy in her walker as she negotiated the railroad tracks. We prepared the group for this very fast and dangerous light, only allowing 5 passengers on the boat. Still, Mayor John was shocked. It was clear after 5 steps into the intersection that neither the Mayor nor Nancy would be able to make it across the street in time. Cars honked. One truck even revved its engine and lurched into the crosswalk in an effort to part the walkers and sneak through for his left turn. "I'm embarrassed for my city today," said the Mayor at the highlight moment. Supervisor Jursik and State Senator Sinicki echoed his feelings. Mayor John had timed all the lights. He promised action. And the next week, when we visited to give a follow up on the Crossings, the walk light was fixed and the timing of the lights extended. Thank you, Mayor John!



### NANCY

We did significant outreach to senior apartment buildings around the intersections we selected for The Crossings. At Packard and Ramsey, we were joined by Nancy, a woman in a walker who had not crossed the street in years. She said she was determined to be able to walk to the Walmart. As the Mayor, State Representative, and County Supervisor all crossed with Nancy, it became clear to them that there was no possible way Nancy could make it safely across on her own. The short timing of the lights and driver behavior (turning right and left even with her in the crosswalk) were clearly obstacles to Nancy's independence and physical health. Crossing with a group of people, some holding guard rails to ensure her safe passage, gave her confidence to keep trying.

# WHAT EQUIPMENT OR PROPS DO WE NEED?

You should feel free to create your own story.

If you choose to use the bridge/boat story, here is a list of the equipment we used:

- Megaphone. We used one with a 3.5mm jack, so a phone could be plugged in to play music.
- Small sails for passengers to hold. We used garden stakes for handles, then made sails from affordable nylon material. We used the nautical alphabet to spell “SEE AND STOP” with our small sails.
- We used a brigantine ship as a model. We created larger sails for “crew” to hold - 2 main sails (a mainmast and a foremast on a real ship), two jibs, and a trysail. Sails could be rigged to an external backpack frame, or we made waist straps with a front socket that were more like a colorguard system of flag-carrying.
- 10’ PVC pipe x 2 for “guard rails” - which you can wrap with red reflective tape from the hardware store, or paint onto, to make them more visible.
- 2 musical triangles
- At least 6 signs, 2 for Crossings, 4 for giving advance notice in each direction of the intersection
- Reflective stickers for cast and passengers to wear
- Programs to hand to drivers - We included a sticker and the Wisconsin Bike Federation’s handout on Pedestrian/Driver laws with our program.
- Posters to be given to area businesses

## DOCUMENTATION

It’s crucial to capture the moments of your Crossings. We had someone photographing each Crossing, and a videography team taking sound and image as well. Consider enlarging and framing select photos of your Crossings and displaying them in a gallery along with stories of neighborhood residents about pedestrian issues. Having a videographer made both participants and drivers feel the importance of the event, and helped us capture the encouraging words of our local officials.





(top) Local businesses put up our posters near the intersections in advance, and kept them up after the event. (middle) A sketch of the sail arrangement for our good ship "Awareness." (bottom) Programs included information about the performance, pedestrian safety tips from our partner the Wisconsin Bike Federation, and a reflective MKE SEES AND STOPS sticker.







*(above) Nancy, center, hadn't been able to cross the street in years due to short timings on the lights. A conversation with her mayor led to change by the following week. (below) Young advocates ring the triangle to show their support for pedestrian safety and driver education.*





## FOR PEDESTRIANS

- Walk on a sidewalk or path whenever one is available.
- If there is no sidewalk or path available, walk facing traffic (on the left side of the road) on the shoulder, as far away from traffic as possible. Keep alert at all times; don't be distracted by electronic devices, including radios, smart phones and other devices that take your eyes (and ears) off the road environment.
- Be cautious night and day when sharing the road with vehicles. Never assume a driver sees you (he or she could be distracted, under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, or just not seeing you). Try to make eye contact with drivers as they approach you to make sure you are seen.
- Be predictable as a pedestrian. Cross streets at crosswalks or intersections whenever possible. This is where drivers expect pedestrians.
- If a crosswalk or intersection is not available, locate a well-lit area, wait for a gap in traffic that allows you enough time to cross safely, and continue to watch for traffic as you cross.
- Stay off of freeways, restricted-access highways and other pedestrian-prohibited roadways.
- Be visible at all times. Wear bright clothing during the day, and wear reflective materials or use a flashlight at night.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs when walking; they impair your abilities and judgment too.

## FOR DRIVERS

- Look out for pedestrians everywhere, at all times. Very often pedestrians are not walking where they should be.
- Be especially vigilant for pedestrians in hard-to-see conditions, such as nighttime or in bad weather.
- Slow down and be prepared to stop when turning or otherwise entering a crosswalk.
- Always stop for pedestrians in crosswalks and stop well back from the crosswalk to give other vehicles an opportunity to see the crossing pedestrians so they can stop too.
- Never pass vehicles stopped at a crosswalk. They are stopped to allow pedestrians to cross the street.
- Never drive under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Follow the speed limit, especially around pedestrians.
- Follow slower speed limits in school zones and in neighborhoods where there are children present.

For additional consulting, please contact the team at  
[islandsofmilwaukee@gmail.com](mailto:islandsofmilwaukee@gmail.com)

[www.islandsofmilwaukee.org](http://www.islandsofmilwaukee.org)

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