



Crossing Minnesota Streets and Roads

Minnesota law supports pedestrian and bicycle travel throughout the state as energy-efficient, nonpolluting, and healthy forms of transportation.¹ In doing so, it identifies specific places and ways that pedestrians and bicyclists may safely cross streets, highways, and other roads. Pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists need to understand the laws that impact how pedestrians and bicyclists are allowed to cross Minnesota roads to support safe travel for all users of the transportation system.

Q: Where can pedestrians and bicyclists cross the road?

A: Pedestrians are allowed to cross roads wherever they choose so long as they:

- 1 Act reasonably to ensure their own safety,
- 2 Follow traffic laws and rules, and
- 3 Are not otherwise prohibited* from crossing in a specific location.⁴

In general, all laws that apply to pedestrians crossing the road also apply to bicyclists when a bicyclist is crossing at a crosswalk or intersection.^{5†}

* Specifically prohibited crossing locations may be indicated by traffic signals or signs, a law enforcement official's direction (*see* MINN. STAT. § 169.02, subd. 2 (2001)), or state or local traffic laws. Local traffic laws are not specifically covered in this resource.

† Further discussion on this below.

Pedestrian

Anyone on foot or using a wheelchair.²

Wheelchair

Any manual or motorized wheelchair, scooter, tricycle, or similar device used by a disabled person as a substitute for walking.³

Q: What does “act reasonably” mean?

A: Acting reasonably under the law means to act as an ordinary, reasonable person would in a similar

situation. Acting reasonably also includes obeying all traffic laws and rules, and other actions or behaviors that would be reasonable under the circumstances. What is reasonable varies greatly and depends on the unique facts of each situation.

For example, a pedestrian has the right to cross before other traffic at crosswalks and intersections when a traffic control signal indicates pedestrians are allowed to cross. At the same time, a pedestrian must not suddenly leave the curb or other place of safety or walk or run into the path of a vehicle which is so close that it is impossible for the driver to stop.⁶

Q: What are specifically designated locations that support pedestrians safely crossing roads?

A: Minnesota law identifies specific places that support pedestrians crossing roads. These include marked crosswalks, intersections with no marked crosswalks, pedestrian safety crossings, crossings for seniors or disabled persons, and railroad grade crossings.

Special types of crossings to protect pedestrians, seniors, and individuals with disabilities include the following.

- A “crossing for seniors or disabled persons” may be established on any street or highway near a senior citizen housing project, senior citizen nursing home, or residential care facility for individuals with disabilities. This may be done on the basis of an engineering and traffic investigation as instructed by MnDOT. The crossing must follow Minnesota’s guidelines for traffic control signals.⁷
- A “pedestrian safety crossing” may be established where pedestrian safety requires extra time for a pedestrian to cross in addition to the time recommended for pedestrian signals under Minnesota’s guidelines for traffic control signals.⁸

Q: Who is in charge of creating these special crossings?

A: In general, local authorities (usually identified as counties, cities, and towns) are given the option to create crossings for pedestrians, seniors, and individuals with disabilities within their communities.

- “Crossings for seniors or disabled persons” may be created by a county board, city council, or town board. However, MnDOT must approve creation of this kind of crossing on a state trunk highway.⁹
- “Pedestrian safety crossings” may be created by a county board, city council, or town board by ordinance. However, cities with less than 100,000 in population may do so only with the approval of the county or other government entity with authority over the crossing.¹⁰

Grade Crossing

The intersection of a public highway and the tracks of a railroad on the same plane or level, except street railways within city limits.¹¹

Q: What laws apply to pedestrians crossing railroad tracks?

A: Because railroads present different dangers from typical roads, streets, and highways, different laws apply to pedestrians crossing railroad tracks. Pedestrians may only cross railroad tracks at Railroad Grade Crossings (grade crossings)¹² and are prohibited from:

- Passing through, around, over, or under any crossing gate or barrier at a railroad grade crossing while the gate or barrier is closed or is being opened or closed;¹³

- Entering, remaining on, or crossing over a railroad track, grade crossing, or pedestrian walkway crossing a railroad track when a bell or clearly visible signal warns of the presence, approach, passage, or departure of a railroad train;¹⁴
- Entering a railroad track, yard, or bridge at a place other than at a designated crossing and without permission.¹⁵

Since railroad property is largely private property, anyone who enters or crosses railroad property outside of grade or other designated crossings without permission is trespassing and may face criminal citations and fines.¹⁶

There are many other laws pertaining to safety at grade crossings, including topics such as advance warning signs and design requirements.¹⁷ Railroad companies have many responsibilities to maintain and operate railroad tracks and crossings to ensure everyone's safety.‡

Q: What traffic laws apply to pedestrians crossing the road?

A: Different laws apply depending on where a pedestrian wants to cross a road.

When crossing the road at an intersection with a marked crosswalk where traffic control signals are present, pedestrians must obey the signals and may only cross the road within the marked crosswalk.¹⁹

If crossing at a marked crosswalk or at an intersection without a marked crosswalk where no traffic control signals are present, both motor vehicle drivers and bicyclists must allow pedestrians already crossing the road to cross the entire road first before driving further through the intersection.²⁰

Similarly, pedestrians must allow traffic in the roadway to pass before attempting to cross at locations without traffic signals, such as at crosswalks, intersections, and undesignated locations like the middle of the street where there is no crosswalk.²¹

Intersection

The area where vehicles traveling on different roads joining at any angle may come in conflict — or — the area within the connection of the side-by-side curb lines or, if none, then the side-by-side boundary lines of the roadways where two roads join one another at (or approximately at) right angles.¹⁸

(This diagram is in reference to the Uniform Vehicle Code's definition of an intersection (same as Minnesota's definition) — taken from the area of the [Federal Highway Administration's website](#) regarding Intersection Safety under the Highway Safety Improvement Program.)



‡These responsibilities and other laws surrounding grade crossings can be found in Minnesota Statute chapter 219, "Railroad Safety and Employment," and Minnesota Rule chapter 8830, "Railroads."

Blind and Deaf Pedestrians

Motor vehicle drivers and bicyclists have more responsibility when a blind or deaf person is the pedestrian waiting to cross the road at an intersection or crosswalk. Both blind pedestrians carrying a white or metallic cane or using a service dog and deaf pedestrians with a service dog (identified with a burnt orange collar or leash) have the right to cross before other traffic at any intersection of any street, avenue, alley, or other public highway.²²

Pedestrians must travel on the right half of the crosswalk when possible.²³

All pedestrians must remember, however, that even though they may have the right to cross the road, such as within crosswalks and at intersections when there is no other traffic in the road, they must still act reasonably to ensure their own safety.²⁴

Q: Can I get in trouble if I cross the street at a time or place I am not supposed to?

A: Yes. For example, disobeying traffic signals and signs or crossing outside of a marked crosswalk at an intersection with traffic control signals is against the law and may result in criminal citations and

Traffic-Control Signal

Any device, whether manually, electrically, or mechanically operated, by which traffic is alternately directed to stop and permitted to proceed.²⁵



fines.²⁶ Additionally, it is important to remember that pedestrians and bicyclists may not be allowed on certain roads, usually for safety reasons. For example, pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized traffic are prohibited from using interstate highways²⁷ — and may be prohibited from or limited in their use of certain other highways.²⁸

In general, obeying traffic laws, signs, and signals—and crossing the road at specific places that support pedestrian and bicyclist safety can help avoid penalties and accidents.

Q: How should pedestrians cross the road where traffic control signals are present?

A: Traffic control signals manage traffic crossing times at intersections and other places where they are in operation. General traffic control signals may have one set of lights that apply to all transportation users, or,



traffic control signals may provide specific pedestrian control signals that display words or pictures.²⁹

It is important to remember that in all situations, vehicles must allow pedestrians lawfully crossing the road to pass first before driving further.³⁰ Pedestrians are considered to be lawfully crossing the road within an intersection or crosswalk with traffic control signals when doing so according to the following rules.³¹

Where there is only one set of lights applicable to all traffic, the following rules apply:³²

■ *Green Signal:*

- Pedestrians facing any green signal (except when the only green signal is a turn arrow) may proceed across the road within any marked or unmarked crosswalk.
- Every driver of a vehicle must allow pedestrians to cross the road first — except, pedestrians must allow vehicles lawfully within the intersection at the time that the green signal indication is first shown to proceed before crossing.

- *Steady Yellow Signal:* Pedestrians facing a circular yellow signal are notified that there is not enough time to cross the road before a red signal is shown and are prohibited from starting to cross the road.
- *Steady Red Signal:* Pedestrians facing a steady red signal alone must not enter the road.

Whenever special pedestrian control signals with the words *Walk* or *Don't Walk* or symbols of a *walking person* or *upraised hand* are in place, the signals or symbols indicate as follows:³³

- *Steady Walk* signal or the symbol of a *walking person:*
 - A pedestrian facing either of these signals may proceed across the road in the direction of the signal, possibly in conflict with turning vehicles.
 - Every driver of a vehicle must allow pedestrians to cross before driving further — except that the pedestrian must let vehicles that are lawfully within the intersection at the time that the signal indication is first shown to pass first.

- *Don't Walk* signal or the symbol of an *upraised hand* (flashing or steady):
 - A pedestrian is prohibited from starting to cross the road in the direction of either signal.
 - BUT — Any pedestrian who has partially crossed on the *Walk* or *walking person* signal must proceed to a sidewalk or safety island while the signal is showing.

Q: How do Minnesota laws on crossing roads impact bicyclists?

A: In general, bicyclists are treated as pedestrians while crossing the street at a crosswalk or intersection.³⁴ This means that all of the traffic regulations discussed above that apply to pedestrians apply equally to bicyclists when crossing at intersections and crosswalks. In doing so, however, bicyclists must not interrupt the path of a pedestrian traveling across a crosswalk or intersection and must give some signal to pedestrians before passing them.³⁵

Vehicle

Every device by which any person or property may be transported or drawn upon a highway, excepting devices used exclusively upon stationary rails or tracks.³⁶

Otherwise, bicyclists have all the same rights and responsibilities as motor vehicle drivers.³⁷ This is because Minnesota law includes *bicycle* in its definition of *vehicle* — meaning the vast majority of traffic regulations apply equally to the operation of *all* vehicles on Minnesota roads, not just motor vehicles.³⁸ If a particular traffic regulation happens to apply only to motorized vehicles, it will use the term “motorized vehicle” instead of just “vehicle.”³⁹ For this reason, bicyclists must obey vehicle traffic rules when not crossing specifically at crosswalks and intersections.

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Endnotes

- ¹ MINN. STAT. § 174.01, subd. 2(14).
- ² MINN. STAT. § 169.011, subd. 53.
- ³ MINN. STAT. § 169.011, subd. 93.
- ⁴ See generally MINN. STAT. §§ 169 (Minnesota Statutes’ “Traffic Regulations” chapter).
- ⁵ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 4(f).
- ⁶ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 2(a).

- ⁷ MINN. STAT. § 169.215. The establishment of this type of crossing on a state trunk highway additionally requires MnDOT approval.
- ⁸ MINN. STAT. § 169.2151.
- ⁹ MINN. STAT. § 169.215.
- ¹⁰ MINN. STAT. § 169.2151.
- ¹¹ MINN. STAT. § 219.16.
- ¹² *See generally* MINN. STAT. §§ 219 (Minnesota Statutes’ “Railroad Safety and Employment” chapter); MINN. R. 8830 (Minnesota Rules’ “Railroads” chapter).
- ¹³ MINN. STAT. § 169.26, subd. 4.
- ¹⁴ MINN. STAT. § 169.26, subd. 4.
- ¹⁵ MINN. STAT. § 609.85, subd. 6.
- ¹⁶ *See* MINN. STAT. §§ 609.85, subd. 6, 169.26, subd. 4(c).
- ¹⁷ *See* MINN. R. 8830.
- ¹⁸ MINN. STAT. § 169.011, subd. 36. Where a highway includes two roadways 30 feet or more apart, then every crossing of each roadway by an intersecting highway is a separate intersection. In the event the intersecting highway also includes two roadways 30 feet or more apart, then every crossing of two roadways of the highways is also a separate intersection. MINN. STAT. § 169.011, subd. 36.
- ¹⁹ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 1, 3(c).
- ²⁰ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 2(a).
- ²¹ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 2(a), 3(a).
- ²² MINN. STAT. §§ 256C.03, 169.202, subd. 2.
- ²³ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 4.
- ²⁴ *See Kachman v. Blosberg*, 251 Minn. 224, 233-34, 87 N.W.2d 687 (Minn. 1958).
- ²⁵ MINN. STAT. § 169.011, subd. 85.
- ²⁶ *See* MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 2(d).
- ²⁷ MINN. R. 8810.0050 .
- ²⁸ *See* MINN. STAT. § 169.305, subd. 1(c), 169.011, subd. 19.
- ²⁹ *See* MINN. STAT. § 169.06, subd. 5, 6 .
- ³⁰ *See* MINN. STAT. § 169.06, subd. 5.
- ³¹ *See* MINN. STAT. § 169.06, subd. 6(b).
- ³² MINN. STAT. § 169.06, subd. 5.
- ³³ MINN. STAT. § 169.06, subd. 6.
- ³⁴ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 4(f).
- ³⁵ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 4(d).
- ³⁶ MINN. STAT. § 169.011, subd. 92.
- ³⁷ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 1. *See also* MINN. STAT. § 169.18. *See generally* MINN. STAT. §§ 169 (Minnesota’s “Traffic Regulations” statute chapter).
- ³⁸ MINN. STAT. § 169.02, subd. 1. *See generally* MINN. STAT. §§ 169 (Minnesota Statutes’ “Traffic Regulations” chapter).
- ³⁹ *See generally* MINN. STAT. §§ 169 (Minnesota Statutes’ “Traffic Regulations” chapter).