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Developing a (Really) Pedestrian Friendly Town

This letter follows on from our correspondence of March 6th 2006* – sent over a year ago on the subject of developing Golden as a Pedestrian friendly town.

We indicate below the broad outline of a pedestrian plan we would ask the City of Golden to urgently undertake as a planning priority:

1. Research International Best Practice. As we pointed out in March 2006, Golden's pedestrian crossings exist in name only. They do not have the signage, engineering or enforcement to merit being treated as serious pedestrian crossings. This is still the case in May 2007.

Cars enjoy the right of way at pedestrian crossings in Golden and pedestrians do not. Until this changes Golden is not, and can never be, a truly pedestrian friendly town. We would ask the City of Golden to research international best practice in crossing design by:

- Reviewing best practice guidelines and standards from around the US and world. This includes best practice in signage (for drivers, pedestrians), road markings, road engineering etc.
- Undertake a study trip to Boulder or other Colorado cities to learn from their pedestrian crossing design and experience.
- Urgently organize and undertake a 'Safe Routes' study of school pedestrian routes and possible improvements for Golden Schools with the Colorado Dept of Transportation as outlined in the attached article, page 3 (Golden Transcript, 3/22/07).
- Consult with the community to define the crossings that should be upgraded to international best practice.
- Define the crossings that will be removed (painted over) – eliminating the possibility of confusion.

2. Build. We would then ask the City of Golden to upgrade the nominated set of crossings to best practice guidelines over the next 12, 24 and 36 months. While the timeline can be flexible based on budget constraints and other priorities – a timeline should be set and published. We would also ask that the findings of the 'Safe Route' study are implemented to assist with 'Walk to School' efforts over a similar, 12, 24 or 36 month time period.

3. Enforce. Finally we would ask the City of Golden Police department is mandated to strictly monitor and enforce pedestrian right of way at the nominated crossings. The efforts of Santa Fe and other New Mexico Police Departments in this area are outlined in the attached Denver Post article, page 4 (Denver Post, 4/8/07). This enforcement should coincide with the upgrade of signage and road design at the nominated crossings. A '*Look out for pedestrians and yield right of way at crossings*' (or similar) sign could be placed at major entry roads into Golden to help educate drivers.

We hope that Golden embraces the opportunity to become a truly pedestrian friendly community and look forward to your feedback on this letter.

Kind Regards

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- **Reference:** 'Developing a (Really) Pedestrian Friendly Town', Chris Adams, Susan Baldacci, March 6th 2006.

Reference: "Walk this Way" – Safe Routes to School Study. Golden Transcript, March 22 2007.



Reference: " Even superhero afraid to cross N.M. drivers" – Crossing Enforcement in New Mexico. Denver Post, April 8th 2007.

Even superhero afraid to cross N.M. drivers

Santa Fe
You've just been pulled over by a police officer. You're told you failed to stop for a pedestrian at a clearly marked crosswalk. As the officer takes out his ticket pad and begins to write, you panic. You quickly rummage through your mind and blurt out one of the following excuses:

A) The guy in the crosswalk was Superman and you figured your car couldn't hurt him.

B) Hey, it wasn't the real Santa Claus that you nearly plowed over in the middle of the intersection, it was just one of those cheap mall Santas.

C) Uh, officer, I'm pretty sure I just saw a gorilla in a hula skirt trying to cross the street. He-he-he.

If you are driving in Las Cruces, N.M., all of those excuses would be understandable. Although you'll still get a ticket.

Because as part of a federally funded pedestrian and traffic safety program conducted in that town — coinciding with similar programs in Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Gallup — police officers did put on costumes and roam out into intersections to see if motorists would stop.

The vast majority did not.

"People drove right by Santa Claus," said Las Cruces police Lt. Chris Miller, who was involved in the program that began more than two years ago. "We had people say they saw the gorilla trying to cross the street but they didn't think they had to stop for him."

In Santa Fe, this art mecca some 200 miles north of Las Cruces, police Sgt. Anthony Rivera laughs.

"We ran the same pedestrian-motorist program up here, but we used real people," he said. "We didn't want to put a monkey out in the intersection."

The safety programs were designed by the University of New Mexico. Health officials with the school conducted injury research and sought ways to cut down on vehicle-pedestrian accidents in the four cities. Each city was granted about \$16,000 in federal money to, well, to intentionally send people out into traffic and see what happened.

Motorists didn't stop for cop

In Santa Fe, Rivera said signs were put up 30 feet from targeted intersections warning motorists that a pedestrian-safety crackdown was underway. At the intersection, orange highway cones were put out. And still, few motorists stopped.

"I walked nine or ten times," Rivera said. "I dressed in plainclothes and no-



Rich Tosches | The Denver Post
Pedestrians try to cross in front of St. Francis Cathedral in Santa Fe last week. Experiments showed that motorists wouldn't stop even for a uniformed cop.



RICH TOSCHES
Rocky Mountain Runner

body stopped. We didn't dart out. We'd just step off the sidewalk and begin a slow walking motion and make it very clear that we were trying to cross the road. The first few times they went right by me, I just couldn't believe it."

Neither could the motorists when officers watching the sting operation pulled them over. Santa Fe police issued about 500 tickets, at \$51 each, during several weeks of the operation late last year. Another round will begin next month.

"We even sent an officer in full uniform, with a reflective vest, out into a crosswalk," Rivera said. "No one stopped for him, either. A lot of people were on their cellphones."

Which cost those motorists a second ticket. For the past three years, it has been illegal to drive within Santa Fe city limits while holding a cellphone. Hands-free devices are allowed.

No fear of Spider-Man

But the real fun was down near the Mexico border in Las Cruces. At any given time Superman, Santa Claus, Spider-Man, Batman and the gorilla in the grass skirt were striding out into busy intersections. Although not all together. That would have been ridiculous.

"We'd have Batman or the gorilla make exaggerated movements as they stepped out in the crosswalk," said Miller, of the Las Cruces police force. "Santa or the gorilla or whoever would alert all approaching motorists that he was legally entering a crosswalk and was about to cross."

The motorists would gawk. And stare. And most of the time keep right on going.

"Our findings were that motorists did not stop any more frequently whether it was a police officer in uniform, someone in plainclothes or whether it was Batman," Miller said. "It really didn't make any difference."

Just ask Spider-Man.

Las Cruces officer Kiri Daines pulled on that costume when the program first began a few years ago. She said she has made as many as 400 of the dangerous crossings.

"I literally had to tap on the hoods of cars as they stopped an inch away from me," Daines said Friday. "I'm in the intersection and they're almost running me over. They're almost running over Spider-Man."

Staff writer Rich Tosches writes each Wednesday and Sunday. He can be reached at rtosches@denverpost.com.

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