

## AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

### Crosswalks make strides near campus

Even the Roo should fear East Exchange Street.

When it comes to pedestrians and traffic, the University of Akron has enjoyed an exceptional run of good luck. You don't have to be a professional risk assessor to realize the high probability of tragedy when hundreds of students per hour are jaywalking across a street that attracts 24,100 vehicles a day.

Part of the problem is that college kids *always* jaywalk. Doesn't matter what college they attend.

The only way to stop it is by writing astronomicaly costly tickets - a PR nightmare for college - or by erecting physical barriers that make jaywalking difficult - requiring major dollars.



**BOB  
DYER**

In this particular situation, we have an additional problem: A crosswalk in the heart of the problem area - the one running from Lee Jackson Field to Kinco's - is not accompanied by a traffic signal. Would you be willing to make a leap of faith that drivers will stop for a crosswalk with no stoplight?

Every year, more and more UA students are living on or near the campus. With the opening of the 450-bed dorm at Exchange and Grant in 2007, and now another 450-bed student apartment complex at Exchange and South Main, the potential for tragedy has soared.

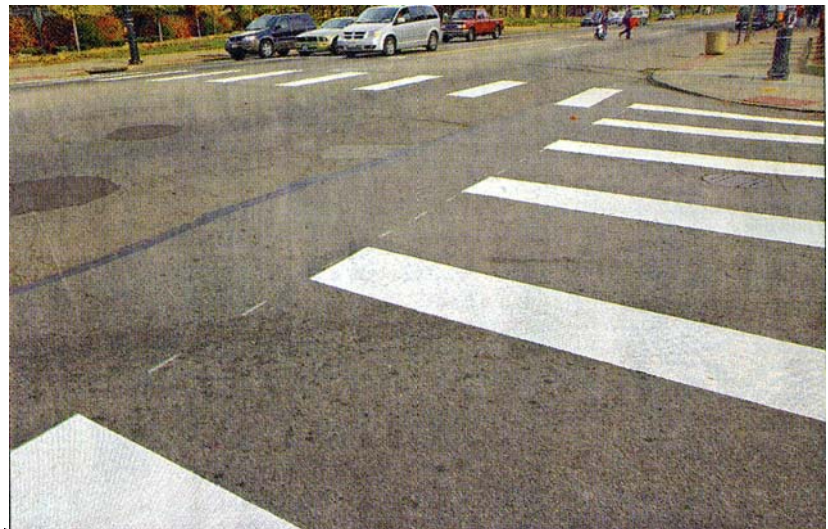
On the plus side, the massive construction project taking place across the street from the Grant Street dorm has shut down the sidewalk for an entire block, funneling students into a smaller area. But that's obviously not part of a long-term fix.

Both the university and the city are concerned.

Deputy Mayor Dave Lieberth says his boss, Don Plusquellic, "has had a personal experience with a student running in front of his car near the campus, so we are acutely aware of the issue."



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A sign pointing to a crosswalk doesn't keep a pedestrian from jaywalking this week on East Exchange Street near the University of Akron.



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By applying thick, ladder-type blocks of tape on the pavement, Akron has made East Exchange Street crosswalks more visible between Grant Street and state Route 8 near the University of Akron.

## Dyer

Crosswalk visibility increases near UA

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Akron Traffic Engineer Dave Gasper is a member of a town-gown task force that has been studying the problem. "There's no cheap solution," he says.

However, some progress is being made. Thanks to a \$11,000 donation from the University Park Alliance, Gasper's crews recently were able to dramatically increase the visibility of the existing crosswalks.

Instead of the city's typical straight, painted lines, the five crosswalks from Grant Street to Goodkirk Street (alongside state

Route 8) are marked with a special tape applied in an extra-wide, ladder-style design (think *Abbey Road*).

Because the change was made less than a month ago, "we haven't been able to gauge whether it's helping," Gasper says. "But when you drive through, you definitely know where the crosswalks are. They're very easy to see."

That they are. The pavement-marking tape also will last much longer - several years - than paint.

The paint used on a typical Akron crosswalk fades within a year. Not all city crosswalks can be repainted each year, and in recent times, the ones near UA have been virtually invisible. Appropriately enough, the city's highest priorities are crosswalks near elementary, middle and high schools.

But tape alone isn't going to

solve the problem. Although no one has the answer, at least officials are continuing to talk.

Ken Stapleton, executive director of the University Park Alliance, is encouraged. He says the wider street markings "will do two things: help the driver recognize that there's a high volume of people walking and biking, and also encourage the people walking and biking to use those crosswalks."

Well, at least in theory. "The word is 'encourage,'" he responds with a chuckle. "People will do what people will do. But anecdotally, people seem to be using the crosswalks more."

Let's hope future anecdotes never involve preoccupied kids being flattened by preoccupied drivers.

Bob Dyer's *Streets* column appears each Friday. He can be reached at 330-996-3580 or [bdyer@thebeaconjournal.com](mailto:bdyer@thebeaconjournal.com).