



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Following Multiple Accidents and Community Outcry, Kennedy Announces DOT Will Fully Revamp Harlem-Walden Intersection

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY November 5, 2015

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Speed Limit Reduction to 35MPH on Walden Ave. Crowns Extensive List of Changes, Will Crack Down on Drivers Speeding Through Intersection

Updated Intersection Will Feature Audible Crosswalk Signals, High Visibility Crosswalks, and Much More

After Two Young Cheektowagans Died at Intersection in Less Than One Year, Officials Demanded Action

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) announced today a comprehensive series of changes to the intersection of Harlem Road and Walden Avenue in the Town of Cheektowaga that will be implemented by the New York State Department of Transportation. These changes come after Kennedy called for changes to the intersection following the deaths of two young Cheektowaga residents, 19-year old Chelsea Chandler and 12-year old Mujtoba Rafid, in less than one year. The intersection, through which tens of thousands of vehicles pass each day, according to recent NYSDOT data, has become one of Cheektowaga’s busiest and deadliest corners. In response to these tragedies, Kennedy along with Assemblywoman Angela Wozniak, and Legislator Patrick Burke have collectively called for an overhaul of the intersection. Following their call, NYSDOT announced the undertaking of a comprehensive study of the intersection.

The planned changes by NYSDOT, to be implemented next month are designed to calm traffic and increase pedestrian safety through a variety of measures and programs. These changes include:

- Lowering of speed limit by 10 MPH on 45 MPH stretch of Walden Avenue between Harlem and Galleria Drive.
- Installation of audible walk signals that will say “walk,” “don’t walk,” and provide a countdown for pedestrians.
- Installation of a brand new “No Right on Red” light that will activate when pedestrian signal is activated, the first to be used in Western New York.
- Replacement of pedestrian indicators.
- Moving of pedestrian crossing buttons to a more visible location.
- Realignment of crosswalks to make them more visible to vehicles.
- Installation of high-visibility crosswalks.

- Redoing of ADA-compliant ramps.
- Implementation of an education program in Cheektowaga schools to ensure local children know how to safely cross intersections.

These changes come after NYSDOT took a holistic look at the Harlem-Walden intersection. The thorough study reviewed all aspects of the intersection, from visibility, to speed, to the location of pedestrians. The relocated pedestrian crossing buttons will also clarify for crossers that the use of the button is required in order to get the full forty seconds to cross that is needed to safely traverse the intersection. Additionally, NYSDOT plans to engage in discussions with the Town of Cheektowaga to address possible changes to the lighting of the corner.

“Two young lives were lost at this intersection, and that is two too many,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “I hope that the Chandler and Rafid families can take comfort knowing that the tragic loss of their children has led to real, substantive change at this deadly intersection. No family should have to go through the pain that these brave families have, and their cry for change has been heard loud and clear by the DOT. I applaud them, and I applaud the DOT for taking decisive action to remedy these dangerous pedestrian crossings. Without the advocacy of the families, these changes could not have happened.”

County Legislator Patrick Burke said “I commend the Department of Transportation for the newly announced safety improvements at the Harlem and Walden intersection; the additional safety features will go a long way in protecting the people of Cheektowaga. The response by the Department of Transportation to the community has been expedient and though nothing can make up for the tragic losses faced by the Chandler Family and the Rafid Family, these actions will help to ensure that simple mistakes do not result in tragedy”

“These badly-needed changes will go a long way towards improving the safety of this intersection,” said **Cheektowaga Supervisor Mary Holtz**. “While increased traffic is a sign of economic development here in Cheektowaga, we must also take steps to protect the many pedestrians who cross here every day, and I am thankful that the DOT has worked with the town and Senator Kennedy to do just that. May we never see another tragedy like the losses of Chelsea Chandler and Mujtoba Rafid.”

Kennedy and Burke noted that the two roads see frequent pedestrian crossings to access the nearby NFTA bus stop, Thruway Shopping Plaza, and many other local businesses. With the changes outlined by NYSDOT, pedestrians will be better-informed of safe times to cross, and will be better-protected by decreased speed limits, No Right on Red lights, and increased visibility to drivers. Kennedy stood at the intersection in July, just weeks after the tragic death of Chelsea Chandler to demand change, while Legislator Burke worked with the community to collect hundreds of signatures also calling for badly-needed updates.

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