

Flashing Yellow Arrow – A Better Left Turn Signal

Flashing yellow left turn arrows at traffic signals are beginning to show up throughout the state and will be incorporated into traffic signals in Scott County very soon. The first one will be a retro-fit installation at the intersection of CH 83 (Canterbury Road) and 12th Avenue in Shakopee. This is planned to be in operation in May.

Flashing yellow arrows are part of an effort to increase traffic flow and maintain safety. Drivers making left turning maneuvers during a flashing yellow arrow must yield to oncoming traffic and turn with caution. Benefits include:

More Flexible

The new display provides traffic engineers with more options to handle variable traffic volumes during different times of the day.

Less Delay

Drivers will have more opportunities to make a left turn with the flashing yellow left-turn arrow than with the traditional three-arrow red, yellow, and green indications, which keeps drivers moving.

Safer

A national study demonstrated that drivers found flashing yellow left-turn arrows more understandable than traditional yield-on-green indications.



Meaning of the Arrows

Solid red arrow

Drivers intending to turn left must stop and wait. Do not enter an intersection to turn when a solid red arrow is being displayed.

Solid yellow arrow

The left-turn signal is about to change to red and drivers should prepare to stop or prepare to complete a left turn if they are legally within the intersection and there is no conflicting traffic present.

Flashing yellow arrow

Drivers are allowed to turn left after yielding to all oncoming traffic and to any pedestrians in the crosswalk. Oncoming traffic has a green light. Drivers must wait for a safe gap in oncoming traffic before turning.

Solid green arrow

Left turn drivers have the right of way. Oncoming traffic has a red light.

Why not just use “Left Turn Yield on Green”?

Both types of control allow left turning drivers to proceed after yielding to oncoming traffic. The Flashing Yellow Arrow control, however, provides the flexibility to restrict the left turns for safety during heavy traffic, while still allowing yielding turns during the off-peak traffic conditions. “Left turn yield on green” signals do not allow this flexibility. Typically, intersections with higher speeds and traffic volumes use three-arrow red, yellow, and green indications only, resulting in higher delay.

Will we see more of these?

Yes. This system has been used in other parts of the country and has also been successfully tested and implemented at numerous intersections across Minnesota. Research has shown that drivers make fewer mistakes when flashing yellow arrow control is used. You will begin to see these implemented more often across the state and within Scott County.

Most new traffic signals will be designed with the Flashing Yellow Arrow, except where separate left turn signals are not needed or places where yielding left turns cannot be safely accommodated. For existing traffic signals, Scott County will prioritize locations for installation based on criteria including traffic volume, lane configuration, and sight distance. Converting traffic signals to Flashing Yellow Arrow control requires significant investment in new hardware and control equipment, and therefore subject to available resource funding.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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