

MUTCD Press Release

by Linda Brown

Traffic control devices communicate critical messages about transportation safety and mobility. Signs, signals, and pavement markings guide road users to their destinations, decrease potential congestion, and reduce the severity and number of roadway crashes.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) publishes the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). It is the national standard for the design, application, and placement of traffic control devices. Its main purpose is to provide uniformity and consistency so road users know what to expect across municipal boundaries. Uniformity also helps reduce the cost of traffic control devices through standardization.

New traffic patterns, unique roadway features, driver behavior, vehicle design innovation, and advances in technology make it necessary to update the MUTCD a periodically. The process for making changes begins with publishing proposed changes in the Federal Register for the public comment. The FHWA reviews the comments and develops the FHWA policy. That policy becomes the Federal Register final rule. The FHWA recently published a final rule announcing the release of the 2003 edition of the MUTCD. (see <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov>) The new edition contains many changes described below:

Traffic Control for Older Drivers

- Increased size of letters on street name signs to improve visibility.
- Street name signs used in advance of intersections for increased reaction time.
- Turning path pavement markings to enhance safety at intersections.

Traffic Control for Incident Management

- New chapter on incident management.
- New color “florescent pink” to distinguish incident management operations.

- Enhanced reference location signs to assist road users in more precisely reporting incident and emergency locations.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety

- In-Street pedestrian signs to warn drivers of pedestrian traffic at un-signalized mid-block crossings.
- Allow use of “Yield” pavement markings for un-signalized mid-block crossings.
- Allow “animated eyes” on pedestrian signal heads to alert pedestrians to look both ways.
- Allow “countdown signals” to help pedestrians judge the time remaining to cross the street.
- New sign to inform bicyclists where to position themselves for actuated traffic signals.
- Prohibit the unsafe practice of placing bicycle lanes within the circular roadway of a round-about.
- Prohibit the unsafe practice of placing bicycle lanes to the right of a right turn only lane.

Safety in Work Areas

- High visibility clothing that meets the requirements of ANSI standards for workers and flaggers.
- Expanded use of channelization and barricade devices to protect workers.
- New language about the proper height and projection of signs in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG).
- Discussion about providing detectable path guidance through temporary or realigned urban work areas to protect pedestrians with visual disabilities.

Note: FHWA publishes an Older Driver Pocket Guide it provides information on traffic control device applications that accommodate the needs of older drivers. These applications are based on recommendations from the Highway Design Handbook for Older Drivers and Pedestrians, FHWA-RD-01-103.