U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

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Office of the Administrator
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

October 28, 2010

In Reply Refer To:
HOTO-1

Ms. Cindy McKim
Director
California Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 942673
Sacramento, CA 94273-0001

Through: Mr. Walter C. Waidelich, Jr.
Division Administrator
Sacramento, CA

Dear Ms. McKim:

Recently, a number of media outlets have published stories about the Federal standards for Street Name signs and deadlines to comply with these standards. Some of these articles contain factually incorrect information. While we will continue to work with various media outlets to get the correct information published, I want to take this opportunity to provide you accurate details of applicable Federal requirements for such signs.

Federal requirements for Street Name signs are contained in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways (MUTCD). Recently, the Federal Highway Administration went through a rulemaking process to issue and adopt the 2009 edition of the MUTCD. This edition adopted new requirements and carried forward previous requirements related to Street Name signs.

The MUTCD requires all Street Name signs, as well as most other signs, to be maintained to a minimum level of retroreflectivity. This sign retroreflectivity requirement was established in 2007 as a result of a congressional directive and has two specific compliance dates for replacing signs: January 2018 for Street Name and other overhead signs, and January 2015 for regulatory, warning, and other post-mounted signs. These compliance dates are based on useful service life of signs. Only signs that fall below minimum retroreflectivity levels need to be replaced, NOT all signs.

When you decide to replace Street Name signs, here are key MUTCD requirements:

- The lettering for Street Name signs shall be composed of a combination of lower-case letters with initial upper-case letters. This requirement applies immediately to any new Street Name signs. There is no specific compliance date for replacement of existing Street Name signs that use all capital lettering. Existing Street Name signs using all capital letters can remain in place until they need to be replaced due to end of service life or some other reason. As a result, agencies do not incur any additional cost to meet this MUTCD requirement.

- The only acceptable background colors for Street Name signs are green, blue, and brown (with a white legend), and white (with a black legend). This requirement applies immediately to any new Street Name signs. Existing Street Name signs that have other background colors can remain in place until they need to be replaced due to end of service life or some other reason.

In addition to the requirements listed above, the MUTCD also contains a number of other very important recommendations related to Street Name signs, such as letter heights. I strongly urge you to review the relevant sections of the MUTCD very carefully before you embark upon any traffic control device replacement initiative.

Please feel free to contact Hari Kalla at Hari.Kalla@dot.gov if you have any questions related to the MUTCD. You can also access the MUTCD online at http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/.

Sincerely,

Victor M. Mendez
Administrator