



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

400 Seventh St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

June 3, 2004

Refer to: HOTO-1

Mr. Greg Miller
Business Development Manager
Roadway Lighting Division
Carmanah Technologies
Building 4, 203 Harbour Road
Victoria, BC V9A 3S2
CANADA

Dear Mr. Miller:

Thank you for your May 20 email message to Mr. Scott Wainwright of our staff, requesting an official interpretation of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) regarding the use of flashing beacons that are actuated by pedestrians. You have asked specifically whether the MUTCD allows a Warning Beacon, supplementing a pedestrian crossing warning sign at an uncontrolled marked crosswalk, to be operated such that the beacon only flashes when a pedestrian is detected.

Section 4K.03 of the MUTCD includes the following statement regarding the operation of Warning Beacons:

"Guidance: Warning Beacons should be operated only during those hours when the condition or regulation exists."

The Pedestrian Crossing warning sign is intended to warn approaching road users of the possibility that a pedestrian may be in the crosswalk. The purpose of supplementing the warning sign with a Warning Beacon is to provide additional emphasis and/or special warning of the conditions that are present. The actual crossing of one or more pedestrians in a crosswalk is almost always an intermittent condition, and in many locations it is a relatively infrequent condition. A continuously flashing Warning Beacon used under this type of condition provides less useful information to the approaching road user than a Warning Beacon that only flashes when a pedestrian is actually present to use the crosswalk. Pedestrian activation of the Warning Beacon under these circumstances provides "real-time" information to the road user on the presence or absence of a potential hazard, and this is considered a superior practice.

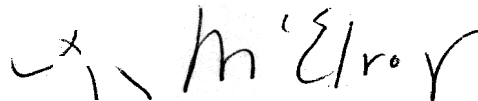
In consideration of the above, it is our interpretation that operation of a Warning Beacon supplementing a pedestrian crossing warning sign, such that the beacon only flashes when a pedestrian is detected, is consistent with MUTCD principles and is not in violation of any



MUTCD provision. The duration of the flashing period should be timed to give adequate advance warning to approaching road users and to give pedestrians adequate time to select a gap in traffic and complete their crossing of the roadway.

Thank you for writing on this subject. If you have any questions, please call Mr. Wainwright at 202-366-0857. Please note that we have assigned your request the following official interpretation number and title: "4-269(I)—Pedestrian Activation of Warning Beacons." Please refer to this number in future correspondence.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Regina S. McElroy". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Regina S. McElroy
Director, Office of Transportation
Operations

cc: Mr. Jim Baron, ATSSA

Wainwright, Scott

From: Wainwright, Scott
Sent: Thursday, January 22, 2004 4:03 PM
To: 'Greg Miller'
Cc: Huckaby, Ernest; Ranck, Fred
Subject: RE: Pedestrian Actuation of Flashing Yellow Beacons at Crosswalks

Dear Mr. Miller

The use of actuated warning beacons supplementing warning signs, including ped-actuated beacons supplementing ped xing warning signs, is not new. It has been used quite frequently in a variety of situations all around the U.S. where the traffic engineer of the jurisdiction determines (through engineering study or judgment) that such an operation is necessary (and affordable) to adequately warn road users of an intermittent condition. In such cases, typically the standard warning sign is accompanied not only by the flashing beacon(s) but also by a supplemental plaque stating "WHEN FLASHING".

As to whether the MUTCD sanctions this application, there is no MUTCD text that exactly states that operation of beacons may be vehicle actuated or pedestrian actuated. However, you have cited the text in Section 4K.03 that is most commonly cited as endorsement of the concept. As far as I know, there has been no Official Interpretation by FHWA on this subject, just tacit (unofficial) acceptance of the practice as it has been implemented around the country. I personally consider it a very good practice, when justified, because it provides "real-time" information to the road user on the presence or absence of a potential hazard.

The above is my personal opinion only and does not constitute an Official Interpretation of the MUTCD as outlined in Section 1A.10 of the MUTCD. If you believe an Official Interpretation is necessary on this subject, please let me know and I will initiate the process here to have one issued.

I hope this helps. Also, would you please take just a couple seconds to check off your answers to 3 very brief questions on the customer service feedback form below and e-mail it back to me. Thank you.

W. Scott Wainwright, P.E., PTOE
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Federal Highway Administration
Office of Transportation Operations, HOTO-1
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Washington, DC 20590

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FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS

MUTCD CUSTOMER QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CORRESPONDENCE AND E-MAIL

The goal of our response was to provide the information or answer you had requested in a timely manner. Please provide feedback to us to let us know how well we met your expectations.

1. Was our response: (CHECK ONE)

- a. much faster than you expected
- b. somewhat faster than you expected
- c. about the timeframe that you expected
- d. somewhat slower than you expected
- e. much slower than you expected

2. Did our response provide: (CHECK ONE)

- a. all the information you asked for plus additional useful information
- b. all the information you asked for
- c. most but not all the information you asked for
- d. only some of the information you asked for
- e. wrong information or answered the wrong question

3. Who do you represent? (CHECK ONE)

- a. State or local government agency
- b. FHWA
- c. US DOT agency other than FHWA
- d. Federal government department other than US DOT
- e. Consultant
- f. Lawyer
- g. Private citizen
- h. National association or organization
- i. Other (describe): _____

4 Comments:

THANK YOU for your feedback. Please return this questionnaire by e-mail to the FHWA MUTCD Team Member at: scott.wainwright@fhwa.dot.gov

-----Original Message-----

From: Greg Miller [mailto:gmillers@jsftechnologies.com]

Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2004 3:49 PM

To: Wainwright, Scott

Subject: Pedestrian Actuation of Flashing Yellow Beacons at Crosswalks

Mr. Wainwright,

I am seeking clarification as to the regulations governing the use of Pedestrian actuated flashing yellow beacons that supplement crosswalk signs.

In no part of Chapter 4K of the MUTCD is the activation of yellow flashing beacons discussed. Taking the intent of section 4K.03 guidance - that beacons should be operated when the condition exists, it seems practical