



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Highway  
Administration**

# Memorandum

Subject: **INFORMATION:** MUTCD – Official  
Ruling No. 2(09)-150 (I) – Position of  
Exit Number and LEFT Plaques on Signs

Date: **MAR 6 2019**

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In Reply Refer To:  
HOTO-1

To: Federal Lands Highway Division Directors  
Division Administrators

**Purpose:** The purpose of this memorandum is to provide clarification of the required location of Exit Number and Left Exit (E1-5P Series) plaques used with signs. This interpretation is based on the provisions of the 2009 edition of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways* (MUTCD).

**Background:** The use of top-mounted plaques to display interchange exit numbering and to indicate a left-side exit at an interchange or left-side entrance to a preferential lane helps improve conspicuity of and command attention toward this valuable orientation information for road users on freeways or expressways. Accordingly, the MUTCD contains the following Standard provisions:

**The exit number shall be displayed on a separate plaque at the top of the Advance Guide or Exit Direction sign.<sup>1</sup>**

**Because road users might not expect an exit to the left and might have difficulty in maneuvering to the left, a left exit number (E1-5bP) plaque (see Figure 2E-22) shall be added to the top left-hand edge of the sign for all left-hand exits (see Figures 2E-14 and 2E-15).<sup>2</sup>**

**When the entry point is on the left-hand side of the general-purpose lanes, a LEFT (E1-5aP) plaque (see Figure 2E-22) shall be added to the top left edge of the Advance Guide and Preferential Lane Entrance Direction signs.<sup>3</sup>**

Some agencies have concluded that where the MUTCD provisions require a plaque be added to the top of a Guide sign, e.g. Advance Guide, Exit Direction, and Preferential Lane Entrance Direction signs, it is acceptable for the plaque to be contained directly within or affixed to the upper portion of the sign face as part of its legend.

<sup>1</sup> MUTCD 2009 Edition at § 2E.31 ¶ 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at § 2E.31 ¶ 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at § 2G.10 ¶ 27.

Section 1A.13 of the MUTCD defines a plaque as follows:

**Plaque**—a traffic control device intended to communicate specific information to road users through a word, symbol, or arrow legend that is placed immediately adjacent to a sign to supplement the message on the sign. The difference between a plaque and a sign is that a plaque cannot be used alone.<sup>4</sup>

This Section also defines a sign panel:

**Sign Panel**—a separate panel or piece of material containing a word, symbol, and/or arrow legend that is affixed to the face of a sign.<sup>5</sup>

As stated in its definition, a distinguishing feature of a *plaque* is that it is not incorporated into the sign legend, but rather it is located “immediately adjacent to” the sign, i.e. abutting or bordering a sign, but not within the sign itself. If it were the intent of the MUTCD to allow such placement within or affixed to the face of the sign, then only an Option provision specifically allowing exit number and left-side movement information to be displayed on a *sign panel* would provide such a deviation from the Standard provisions referenced heretofore. However, there is no Option provision so allowing. Therefore, neither the Exit Number (E1-5P and E1-5bP) plaques nor the LEFT (E1-5aP) plaque may be incorporated into the legend of an Advance Guide, Exit Direction, or Preferential Lane Entrance Direction sign.

**Conclusion:** It is the official interpretation of the FHWA that the Exit Number (E1-5P) plaque, Left Exit Number (E1-5bP) plaque, and LEFT (E1-5aP) plaque shall not be incorporated into the legend of an Advance Guide, Exit Direction, or Preferential Lane Entrance Direction sign. Rather, these plaques shall be placed above and abutting the signs to which they apply, with their left or right edges aligned with those of the sign for left- and right-side movements, respectively, as provided in the MUTCD. These arrangements are illustrated in Figure 2E-26 of the MUTCD.

For recordkeeping purposes, this interpretation has been assigned the following Official Ruling number and title: “2(09)-150 (I) Position of Exit Number and LEFT Plaques on Signs.” Please direct any inquiries regarding this information to Mr. Marty Calawa, [Martin.Calawa@dot.gov](mailto:Martin.Calawa@dot.gov), of the MUTCD Team.

cc:

Associate Administrators  
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<sup>4</sup> MUTCD, Definition No. 147.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, Definition No. 197.

