

Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
400 Seventh St. SW
Washington, DC 20590

May 16, 2002

Refer to: HOTO-1

Mr. Mark Lewis
City Engineer/Traffic Engineer
City of Fountain Valley
10200 Slater Avenue
Fountain Valley, CA 92708

Dear Mr. Lewis:

Thank you for your March 25 letter submitting the completed evaluation report and field data for the approved experimentation (4-196 (Ex)) with pedestrian signal countdown displays at five intersections in Fountain Valley.

We appreciate your timely data collection and submission of your final report. The results presented, including reductions in the number of pedestrians still in the crosswalk when the signal turned red and reductions in observed vehicle-pedestrian conflicts, are encouraging. Unfortunately, the statistical significance and validity of your conclusions may be called into question because:

- Before and after data were, for the most part, not collected on the same days of the week and in the same time periods. We had requested this to minimize other factors that might influence the comparability of the data.
- Most of the motorist data collection apparently only recorded behavior of vehicles that conflicted with a pedestrian. It appears that there was insufficient data collected to determine whether the number of motorists entering the intersection on yellow and red increased after the countdown displays were installed, possibly due to drivers' seeing the countdown and speeding up to "beat the light." This issue is one of the key questions we had hoped experimentations such as yours would help answer.
- It is unclear how the 11.2 percent before and 4 percent after percentages of conflicts between motorists and pedestrians were calculated. We assume you used hourly or daily traffic volumes in the before and after periods to calculate these percentages, but the report is silent on this.

Despite these shortcomings, we do feel that your experimentation has been worthwhile, and we appreciate Fountain Valley's undertaking the project and submitting the report in a very timely manner.

As a result of experimentation in a variety of jurisdictions and a recommendation from the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) that pedestrian signal countdown displays be made uniform in design and application, we are strongly considering adding the pedestrian signal countdown display to the MUTCD for optional use, as a part of the Notice of Proposed Amendments to the MUTCD that is expected to be published in the Federal Register this spring. As such, in accordance with Section 1A.10 of the MUTCD, we have no objection to the city of Fountain Valley continuing to operate the pedestrian signal countdown displays until such time as a final ruling is made, at which time the city of Fountain Valley may be required to modify or remove the displays depending on the details of the final rule.

Again, we do appreciate your interest in improving conditions for pedestrians and if we can be of further assistance, please contact Mr. Scott Wainwright at 202-366-0857.

Sincerely yours,

Shelley J. Row, P.E.
Director, Office of Transportation
Operations