



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MICHAEL F. EASLEY  
GOVERNOR

L YNDO TIpPETT  
SECRETARY

May 29,2001

Ms. Shelley J. Row, Director Office of  
Transportation Operations FHWA  
400 Seventh Street, SW  
HOT 0-1, Room 3401 Washington, D.  
C. 20590

Dear Ms. Row:

This is to request the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provide an interpretation of MUTCD requirements for Red Arrows.

The Motor Vehicle Laws of North Carolina (see attached GS 20-158) provide that motorists facing a red light at an intersection may make a Right-Turn-on-Red (RTOR) after stopping, except where prohibited by an appropriate sign.

The Millennium MUTCD begins Section 4D.04, "Meaning of Vehicular Signal Indications," with the Standard "Unless otherwise determined by law, the following meanings shall be given to highway traffic signal indications for vehicles and pedestrians." Section 4D.04 further requires a Standard that "vehicular traffic facing a steady Red Arrow signal indication shall not enter the intersection to make the movement indicated by the arrow.. .and shall remain stopped until a signal indication permitting the movement by such Red Arrow is shown." This Section, as an Option, allows turns after stopping for a steady Red Arrow when a sign is in place permitting the turn.

Section 40.05, "Application of Steady Signal Indications," further emphasizes the Standard that "turning on a steady Red Arrow signal indication shall not be permitted." This Section does not reference the option to use a sign permitting turns after stopping for the steady Red Arrow.

The Millennium MUTCD requires the use of a sign under the Option of permitting turns on Red Arrows, whereas the Motor Vehicle Laws of North Carolina requires a sign whenever turns on red are prohibited. Under the existing law, motorists in North Carolina can consistently expect to legally make a right turn on a red indication unless there is a sign prohibiting it. With the new sign required by the Millennium MUTCD, motorists will be challenged to judge if they can

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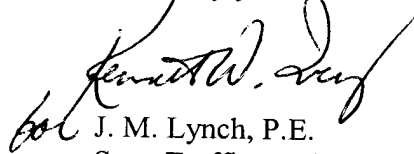
legally make a turn on red based upon the signal indications, as well as the signs. At some locations, there will be signs permitting turns on red. At other locations, there will be signs prohibiting turns on red. Locations that depend solely on the signal display for determining turn on red restrictions may not be signed. The opportunity for misinterpretation of these traffic control devices may be an issue warranting further investigation.

It is our interpretation that the Motor Vehicle Laws of North Carolina provides the legal basis to continue to allow RTOR at steady Red Arrow signal indications, except when a sign is in place prohibiting the movement. We believe this interpretation is consistent with the requirements of the Millennium MUTCD. Does FHWA agree with this interpretation? We also request FHWA include the phrase "Unless otherwise determined by law" in Section 4D.05 to be consistent in both the meaning and application of signal indications.

Your prompt response to our request will be greatly appreciated as the update to the North Carolina Supplement to the MUTCD is currently being developed. In addition, several signal locations are currently under design that may require Red Arrow indications.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact either Mr. Ken Ivey, PE or me at (919) 733-3915.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. M. Lynch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "L".

J. M. Lynch, P.E.  
State Traffic Engineer

JML/ki

Attachment

cc: N. L. Grai: PE, FHWA Division Administrator

Ken Ivey, P.E.

T. A. Peoples, P.E.

J. F. Permar, P.E.

R. E. Mullinax, P.E.