

February 19, 2003

Refer to: HOTO-1

Mr. Edward L. Fischer
State Traffic Engineer
Oregon Department of Transportation
355 Capitol Street NE., Fifth Floor
Salem, OR 97301-3871

Dear Mr. Fischer:

Thank you for your January 14 letter to Mr. Dave Cox of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Oregon Division Office. Your letter was forwarded to me for reply. In your letter, you requested approval to experiment with pedestrian countdown signal displays at one intersection in the city of Ontario, Oregon.

As you may be aware, the FHWA has published in the Federal Register a Notice of Proposed Amendment (NPA) for Revision No. 2 of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). That NPA includes the proposed addition of pedestrian countdown displays for optional use, with uniform design and operation when used. The docket for comments on this and the other proposals closed on August 19, 2002, and a Final Rule for Revision No. 2 is anticipated sometime in the late summer or early fall of 2003. Until such time as a Final Rule is issued, countdown pedestrian displays are still considered experimental. We approve your request to experiment with pedestrian countdown displays at the one intersection in the city of Ontario detailed in your letter, with the following conditions:

1. The countdown displays and operation should correspond to those detailed in the proposed MUTCD Revision No. 2.
2. Your evaluation to address user response should be conducted after the countdown displays are installed and after users have had a chance to become accustomed to them. It is suggested that at least 100 pedestrians be asked questions to assess their understanding, such as "Do you interpret the combination of the flashing DON'T WALK and the numbers to mean it is legal to enter the crosswalk on a flashing DON'T WALK as long as you can reach either the median or the other side prior to the countdown device reaching zero?" We also suggest you phrase questions so the pedestrian has to explain or select the meaning of the indications (multiple choice answers). For example: What does the WALK indication mean? What does the flashing DON'T WALK mean?

What does the solid DON'T WALK mean? What do the numbers indicate to you? Do you cross any differently with the countdown signal than with traditional pedestrian signals? Please provide us with a report summarizing the data after it is collected.

3. Per Section 1A.10 of the MUTCD the experimentation must be terminated at any time that you determine that significant safety concerns are directly or indirectly attributable to the experimentation. Also, please note that the FHWA's Office of Transportation Operations retains the right to terminate approval of the experimentation at any time if there is an indication of safety concerns.

Your request to experiment is approved for 1 year or until such time as a final ruling on the proposed MUTCD Revision No. 2 is made, whichever occurs first. Upon issuance of a final ruling on proposed MUTCD Revision No. 2, the city of Ontario and/or the Oregon Department of Transportation may be required to modify or remove the pedestrian countdown displays depending on the details of the Final Rule.

For future reference, we have numbered and titled this experimentation as "4-256 (Ex) – Ontario, OR Pedestrian Countdown." Please reference this number in any future correspondence. 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,

/s/ Shelley Row

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