

Federal Highway Administration
400 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, DC 20590

Refer to: HOTO-1

January 29, 2003

Mr. Gary D. Thompson
State Traffic Engineer
Minnesota Department of Transportation
395 John Ireland Boulevard
Mailstop 725
St Paul, MN 55155

Dear Mr. Thompson:

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) was contacted late last year by Mr. Jon Jackles of your staff regarding the status of action by FHWA on the that Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) experimentation project "Auto Flagger" (VI-102 (E)).

Over the past several months, staff with the FHWA Headquarters Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) team have been gathering and evaluating information and reports on a number of devices which serve the purpose of enhancing the STOP SLOW Paddle. Included are devices, which automate the temporary traffic control flagger operation to improve the safety of highway workers in work zones.

In December of 2002, Mr. Jackles provided Mr. Pete Rusch, Safety Engineer with the FHWA Mid-Western Resource Center and member of the MUTCD team, copies of correspondence and a report summarizing the MNDOT experimentation with the "Auto Flagger." Other devices being evaluated by FHWA include the Illinois Department of Transportation (ILDOT) "J4 Flagger's Workstation," the "Remote Controlled Flagman" and the "Automated Remote Flagger." The FHWA is currently aware of only these automated remote flagger devices. There are also a number of variants of the STOP SLOW paddle design. Mr. Rusch had hoped to discuss these devices with the Temporary Traffic Control Technical Committee (TTC) of the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (NCUTCD) at it's recent winter meeting in Washington, DC. Unfortunately, the entire agenda of the TTC Technical Committee was taken up on matters related to the American with Disabilities Act draft Accessibility Guidelines and specifically accommodating persons with disabilities in temporary traffic control zones.

Recognizing from the information that we have to date, that there may be significant potential safety benefits for highway workers and motorists with the use of the "Auto Flagger" or similar devices. The following bullets detail how the FHWA will proceed on this matter.

- We do agree in principle with the concept of the "Auto Flagger" device and authorize MNDOT to continue the use of the device under the original Request for

Experimentation approval VI-102(E). Ultimately, inclusion of language in the MUTCD related to automated flagging devices would require rulemaking and crash testing.

- The MNDOT will develop appropriate language for consideration by FHWA for the inclusion of the "operational characteristics" of the "Auto Flagger" or similar devices in the MUTCD to allow their use.
- The FHWA staff will arrange with ILDOT staff to observe the operation of the "Auto Flagger" during the upcoming construction season.
- The FHWA staff will facilitate discussion of the "Auto Flagger" and other similar devices with the TTC Technical Committee of the NCUTCD at its summer meeting in Savannah, Georgia, in June of 2003.
- Mr. Pete Rusch of the FHWA will be the point of contact for coordinating all the necessary activities to achieve a conclusion on the possible inclusion of operational language in the MUTCD to allow the use of the "Auto Flagger" or similar automated flagger devices. Mr. Rusch may be reached on his cell phone 608-239-1852. His email address is: peter.rusch@fhwa.dot.gov. His mailing address is: Mr. Peter F. Rusch, Safety Engineer, Federal Highway Administration, 567 D'Onfrio Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53719.

As a final thought, may we suggest that MNDOT staff coordinate the development of proposed MUTCD language in collaboration with ILDOT and MNDOT. The "Auto Flagger" is very similar in operational characteristics to the "J4 Flaggers Workstation" that is in the ILDOT experimentation project. This affords an excellent opportunity to craft generic operational characteristics language that would apply to more than one device. We are sending a similar letter to ILDOT. Mr. Rusch will inform Mr. Thompson who the contact will be at ILDOT.

Again, thank you for your contact and stimulating continued action on these very important safety matters.

Sincerely yours,

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