

Unscientific Survey Results from Washington State

(5 cities, 6 counties, and 1 consultant representing cities and counties)

Regarding: Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Final Rule on Maintaining Traffic Sign Retroreflectivity

Found in:
FHWA-2003-15149 in Federal Register Vol. 72, No. 245

April 16, 2008

Total survey responses: 12 (5 cities, 6 counties, 1 consultant representing cities and counties)

Background:

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) published the final rule for Maintaining Traffic Sign Retroreflectivity on 12/21/2007. The rule became effective on 1/22/2008. It modifies section 2A.09 of the 2003 Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).

The following website, www.fhwa.dot.gov/retro, provides the official rule. See Docket No. FHWA-2003-15149 in Federal Register Vol. 72, No. 245. The website also has a helpful brochure explaining the changes.

Washington State Department of Transportation Highways and Local Programs invited the members of the Urban Traffic Engineers Council (UTEC) to complete the survey. These members include:

1. All 39 Washington counties.
2. 77 Washington cities.
3. Washington State Department of Transportation.
4. Four Public Works consultants.

We asked individuals to answer the following questions on behalf of their agency. Here were their responses.

1. The agency I work for is:

There were 12 responses from 12 agencies.

A city in Washington State: 5 responses (41.7%)

A county in Washington State: 6 responses (50%)

Washington State Department of Transportation: 0 responses (0%)

Another Washington State agency: 0 responses (0%)

I am a consultant who serves or represents Washington's cities and counties: 1 response (8.3%)

Other: 0 responses (0%)

2. Is your agency aware of the new requirements for minimum sign retroreflectivity?

There were 12 responses from 12 agencies.

Yes: 12 responses (100%)

No: 0 responses (0%)

I don't know: 0 responses (0%)

3. Has your agency estimated the costs for meeting compliance requirements?

There were 11 responses from 12 agencies.

Yes: 2 responses (18.2%)

No: 9 responses (81.8%)

I don't know: 0 responses (0%)

4. What are the costs?

There was 1 response from 12 agencies.

One-time capital costs: 0 responses (0%)

Annual costs: 1 response (100%) \$70,000-\$80,000

Other costs: 0 responses (0%)

5. What are the assumptions behind these costs?

There was 1 response from 12 agencies.

One-time capital costs: 0 responses (0%)

Annual costs: 1 response (100%) \$120k total per year, however replace \$50k per year historically

Other costs: 0 responses (0%)

6. What funding sources will your agency pursue to meet the new requirements?

There were 15 responses from 12 agencies.

No new funding sources. The costs are already built into our annual maintenance budget: 3 responses (20%)

County road funds or Street use funds: 3 responses (20%)

Local improvement district: 0 responses (0%)

Issue bonds: 0 responses (0%)

Special appropriations from council: 0 responses (0%)

Grants: 3 responses (20%)

This has not yet been determined: 5 responses (33.3%)

Other: 1 response (6.7%)

I don't know: 0 responses (0%)

7. Please explain and provide more detail for your answer to question 6 above.

There were 8 responses from 12 agencies.

The costs are too variable. But we anticipate a significant expense over time which cannot be adequately budgeted for or anticipated.

These costs will hinder our ability to complete other road maintenance and capital improvements, since the only known funding source is our county road fund. We understand there may be some grants available, but they are limited in their scope and application.

We will have to start making changes slowly, year by year.

It is possible as a consultant that I will look for either WSDOT or Federal funding to work on retroreflectivity programs for different agencies.

We have been using the comparative method on a biannual basis.

We have not determined how to fund the new requirements. But we will pursue grants if they become available.

At this time, we are working on an updated sign inventory, from which we will establish an annual replacement program. We have many signs that either need replacement now or will need to be changed after adoption of the 2009 MUTCD. We intend to meet the retroreflectivity requirements through replacement every 7 to 10 years using our annual maintenance budget. If we determine we need additional monies, we will submit requests through our budget process.

We started changing most of our Engineer grade signs to high intensity in the mid 1990s, and we have measured a control sample and found them to still be comfortably above the new minimums. Even some of our engineer grade (i.e., black on white) are comfortably above the minimums. So the major impact of the new rule on us is changing out our Engineer grade street name signs (white on green) to Type III/IV.

8. Background: The Rule sets three compliance dates:

1) January 2012 to implement and then continue to use an assessment or management method that is designed to maintain traffic sign retroreflectivity at or above the minimum levels shown in MUTCD's new Table 2A-3. Note: Washington State Department of Transportation's Highways & Local Programs office is developing a free sign management program for cities and counties. For more information, please contact Susan Bowe at (360) 705-7380 or BoweS@wsdot.wa.gov.

2) January 2015 to replace any regulatory, warning, or ground-mounted guide (except street name) signs that do not meet the minimum retroreflectivity levels.

3) January 2018 to replace any street name signs and overhead guide signs that do not meet the minimum levels.

Note: The next version of the MUTCD may require other changes in signing requirements.

Question: Will your agency be able to meet all three of these compliance dates? Also, when does your agency intend to begin making necessary changes to meet the dates?

There were 10 responses from 12 agencies.

Part 1: Maybe.

Part 2: It is all dependent upon an increase in funding.

Part 1: We should be able to.

Part 2: We have no plans at this time.

Part 1: Not without additional funding.

Part 2: Our city is very large and it is unrealistic that we can meet the deadlines with no funding to accomplish that.

Part 1: Within the next year, replacement signs will meet retroreflectivity standards.

Part 2: Updating all signs and maintaining them to the new standard is an unfunded federal mandate. As such, we have no firm plan on how we can comply. We have too much other time-critical work to focus on this new requirement at this time.

Part 1: Yes

Part 2: Unanswered.

Part 1: Yes.

Part 2: Our agency currently has some of the components in place. I anticipate modifications to our current operations to take place within the next few years.

Part 1: Yes.

Part 2: No changes will be necessary.

Part 1: This has not been determined. We are still in the development process.

Part 2: Initially laid it out to replace all signs not in compliance per year.

Part 1: At this time, we should be able to meet these dates.

Part 2: Unanswered.

Part 1: Yes.

Part 2: We are already making changes. For example, we have changed our street name signs to Type III/IV sheeting.

9. **Background: On 1/2/2008, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued the notice of proposed amendments to the 2003 MUTCD. These can be viewed at <http://www.mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/res-notices.htm>. See Docket No. FHWA-2007-28977 in Federal Register Vol. 73, No. 1. Once approved, these amendments would be incorporated into the next version of MUTCD. FHWA needs comments by 7/31/2008.**

Question: Has your agency evaluated the proposed changes to the 2003 MUTCD related to signing?

There were 11 responses from 12 agencies.

Yes: 6 responses (54.5%)

No: 5 responses (45.5%)

I don't know: 0 responses (0%)

10. Thank you for answering this survey. What comments or questions do you have?

There were 3 responses from 12 agencies.

Question: Will you provide the results of this survey? We would appreciate seeing them.

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Answer: Yes. Washington State Department of Transportation Highways & Local Programs will hand out this survey at the April 29, 2008 Urban Traffic Engineers Council (UTEC) meeting in Moses Lake and the May 8, 2008 UTEC meeting in Kent. It can also be sent by e-mail. Contact Susan Bowe at (360) 705-7380 or BoweS@wsdot.wa.gov.

Question: Will WSDOT have a program either under safety grants or through the Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) to assist local agencies in meeting deadlines? The Federal government should provide specific funding, but they are not.

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Answer: WSDOT does not plan to fund maintenance activities, such as sign replacement, with safety funds. However, if a safety project is funded that relates to signing in some way, then new signs could be included as part of the solution. For example, if drivers are not stopping at a stop-controlled intersection, larger stop signs might be part of the safety improvement. As such, new stop signs, stop ahead signs, etc., could be funded with those safety funds, which could result in both a safety improvement and increased retroreflectivity.

Safety funds will be distributed based on Strategic Highway Safety Plan (Target Zero) priorities. The overall priority in that plan is reducing fatal and serious injury collisions.

More information on Target Zero, please see:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/BC9C8BDB-A735-4948-850A-47B72696E4D9/0/SHSP.pdf>

Comment: We are more concerned about letter size requirements on street name signs than retroreflectivity. And we REALLY worry about pavement marking retroreflectivity, given our limited ability to respond in winter months due to weather.