U.S. Department
of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

OCT 2 2 2010

In Reply Refer To:
HOTO-1

John R. Njord, P.E.
Executive Director
Utah Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 141265
Salt Lake City, UT 84114

Dear ~~Mr.~~ John Njord:

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in recent discussions regarding your July 6 letter to Administrator Mendez. Based on the issues raised in your letter and during the September 14 teleconference with representatives of the Utah Department of Transportation, we are issuing this Official Interpretation of the provisions of the 2009 *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD) related to the signing of freeway and expressway exits that have an option lane. Two specific issues discussed during the September 14 teleconference are addressed in this interpretation.

The first issue deals with what is meant by "reconstructed" in Section 2E.21, Paragraph 2, of the MUTCD. It is our Official Interpretation that the term "reconstructed" in this Section applies to those facilities where the replacement of the overhead sign support structures is made necessary as a result of the reconstruction, typically due to either widening or reconfiguration of the travel lanes. If the existing sign support structure is to remain, then the existing signing may remain or be replaced in kind provided that other provisions within the MUTCD are not violated.

The second issue deals with the definition of the term "major interchange" as it applies to the requirement to use Overhead Arrow-per-Lane signing at multi-lane exits that have an option lane. Section 2E.20 requires the use of either Overhead Arrow-per-Lane signs or Diagrammatic signs at major interchanges. A "major interchange" is defined in Section 2E.32 (and similarly in Section 1A.13) as:

> (a) [I]nterchanges with other expressways or freeways, or (b) interchanges with high-volume multi-lane highways, principal urban arterials, or major rural routes where the volume of interchanging traffic is heavy or includes many road users unfamiliar with the area.

RECOVERY.GOV

The definition of category (a) major interchanges is very clear and is not open to interpretation. Thus, Overhead Arrow-per-Lane guide signs are required for multi-lane exits with an option lane at these "system" interchanges if they are new or reconstructed. The determination of what constitutes a category (b) major interchange for purposes of the Overhead Arrow-per-Lane signing requirement is what is unclear and is the subject of this interpretation.

There is an inherent level of flexibility in the category of "Major (b)" because specific criteria such as "high-volume," "heavy traffic," "principal," "many," and other terms used to define this category of the "major" classification are not quantified in the MUCTD. In particular, the term "principal urban arterial" is not defined in the MUTCD. In this context, "principal urban arterial" is not necessarily intended to apply categorically to all routes in a particular highway agency's system of functional classification that happens to use this nomenclature. In all cases, the determination of whether a particular interchange has characteristics that would classify it as major (b) or intermediate can be determined only through the application of engineering judgment.

Thus, it is our Official Interpretation that engineering judgment is to be used to determine whether a particular non-system interchange multi-lane exit with an option lane should be classified as a category (b) major interchange or as an intermediate interchange for the purposes of guide signing design and, in particular, for required application of Overhead Arrow-per-Lane guide signs. Overhead Arrow-per-Lane signs have been shown to provide significant benefits to unfamiliar drivers and, therefore, the highway agency should give careful consideration to this aspect in making its determinations for a given multi-lane exit with an option lane.

It should also be noted that Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Section 2E.20 recommend consideration of the use of Overhead Arrow-per-Lane guide signs for multi-lane exits with an option lane at intermediate and minor interchanges. Interchanges of these classifications can also have unfamiliar users that will derive significant benefits from Overhead Arrow-per-Lane guide signs.

We appreciate the opportunity to clarify the intentions of the provisions of the MUTCD and trust that this interpretation will address your concerns. For recordkeeping purposes, we have assigned this interpretation the following Official Ruling number and title: "2(09)-5(I) – Overhead Arrow-per-Lane Sign Requirements for Major Interchanges and Reconstructed Locations—Utah." Please refer to this number and title in any future correspondence on this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Jeffrey A. Lindley
Associate Administrator for Operations