

# Crossroads

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TRANSPORTATION Information Center — LTAP

University of Wisconsin—Madison

## New sign manual to arrive soon

After years of work the Federal Highway Administration has nearly finished rewriting the nation's road sign bible — the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD). An almost-final version is available online. Paper copies will be printed in late spring when errors are corrected.

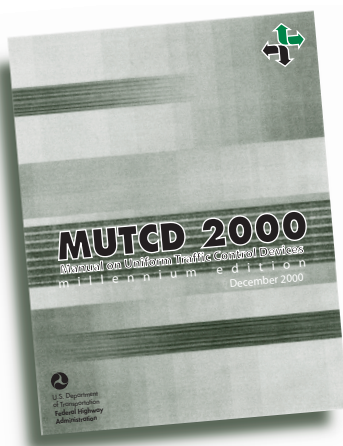
In Wisconsin the *MUTCD* will not take effect until after the Department of Transportation officially adopts it and puts out the *Wisconsin Supplement*. "It will probably be about a year until we formally adopt it," says Pete Rusch, Traffic Engineer at WisDOT. Also about a year away is the new book on how to lay out and manufacture the signs.

The manual's many changes reflect new technology, research and conditions. There are new signs for bike lanes, speed humps and traffic circles, for example, and guidance on accessible pedestrian signals that meet criteria in the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. A new section, Part V, addresses traffic-control devices for low volume roads.

An April T.I.C. workshop, **Local Road Signing**, will introduce participants to the book, its significant changes, and timetables for adopting them. "We want feedback from workshop participants," says Bill Bremer, Wisconsin Coordinator for FHWA. "WisDOT will use the information when they work on the state Supplement." (See the Calendar on page 4 for workshop details.)

### What's new in the MUTCD?

The new manual is more user-friendly and has many more charts and pictures. Especially helpful are new headings that organize and clarify which sections are mandatory, recommended or optional.



**Standard**—Designates required, mandatory, or specifically prohibited practices.

**Guidance**—Recommended, but not mandatory, practices in typical situations.

**Option**—For permitted practices having no requirement or recommendation.

**Support**—For informational statements.

Other changes and additions include:

- Elimination of the term "warrants" for Stop and Yield signs.
- Changes in advance warning crosswalk signs.
- New requirements and guidance for centerline and edgeline pavement markings.
- New guidance for street name signs.
- Signs and markings for speed humps and traffic circles.
- Standards and guidance on signs and markings for bike lanes, bike paths and shared use paths.
- Guidance on the use of accessible pedestrian signals.

You can read and download sections of the new *MUTCD* in Adobe Acrobat from the Web: <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/kno-millennium.htm> See the Calendar on page 4 for workshop information.

## Signing on with inventory programs

Keeping road signs in shape is important for public safety and legal liability. To help with the job, some streets and highway agencies are using computer sign inventories.

"We're using it primarily to identify what have out there and to help with budgets," says Karl Manthe, Street Superintendent for the City of Stoughton Streets Department. The city has 1280 signs on its 57 miles of streets. Until last fall when they got the Sign View program working, crews recorded sign conditions in notebooks. Now they take a laptop computer out in the truck with them and record repairs and replacements at each sign job.

"It gives you a good idea of what you've got for signs," says Manthe. "It helps when you are asking for more money if you can say: 'gosh we have this many signs out there and here's the percentage we have to replace and it will cost this amount.'" It cost about

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## Inventory programs

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\$8,800 to get started: \$2185 for the software and \$6632 for consulting.

Stoughton hired consultant Bill Wiedenbeck to create the initial data base. However, it wasn't until they added clerical help that they could really begin to use the program. "Some places don't have anybody in the office who can download the records and keep the inventory up," says Wiedenbeck. "One agency inventoried all their signs, then put the data on the shelf and five years later it's still sitting there."

For a sign inventory to be effective crews have to be willing (and able) to use it and management has to commit adequate staff resources.

## Program protects liability

Liability concerns prompted Dodge County to invest in a computer sign inventory recently. "We get into court cases sometimes where they question the quality of the sign and when it was last updated," says Highway Commissioner Bob Sindelar. "This program gives us a legal history of sign condition."

Each sign record includes a digital photo which crews update when they replace the sign. Dodge County crews also take laptops along in the truck to record their actions. The program helps Dodge County manage its sign inventory and schedule maintenance work. They plan to integrate their sign inventory with



a county-wide GIS system when it is fully installed and the sheriff will also have access to sign data for the 911 system.

For 6,200 signs on 545 road miles it cost the county about \$30,000 to get the inventory program going: \$4500 for software, \$23,000 to the consultant for the initial inventory, and about \$2000 for the laptop computer. Staff time was extra.

## State managing 500,000 signs

WisDOT districts have inventoried about half of the state's estimated 500,000 highway signs, says Matt Rauch the DOT civil engineer in charge of the sign program. "It takes a lot of work to get going, but we feel it is worth it," he says. "It will allow us to operate more efficiently in the future, especially when the Federal Highway

Administration's minimum retroreflectivity standard for signs takes effect."

Currently the big benefit is in helping Districts plan their work activities—both for immediate assignments and for the budget year. It also gives them more effective control of their sign inventories. In addition, it can help prevent replacing signs prematurely. For example, a crewman may think a sign looks bad, but the history shows it is only eight years old and probably has three or four years of life left.

Plans are to make the sign database accessible to anybody who is interested, probably on an Internet web page.

For more information contact Karl Manthe, Stoughton, at 608/873-6303, Bob Sindelar, Dodge County, at 414/386-3653, or Matt Rauch, WisDOT, 608/266-0150.

## Reader Response

If you have a comment on a **Crossroads** story, a question about roadways or equipment, an item for the *Idea Exchange*, a request for workshop information or resources, or a name for our mailing list, fill in this form and mail *in an envelope* to:

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