

CITY OF OAKLAND



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April 1, 2021

Stephanie Pollack, Acting Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Request for an expedited reframing of the MUTCD as a proactive safety regulation

Dear Acting Administrator Pollack:

The City of Oakland Department of Transportation respectfully requests that FHWA reframe and rewrite the MUTCD, creating a path for the creation of comprehensive safety-based guidance. Doing so will allow FHWA and the Biden Administration to make strides towards equity, sustainability, while reducing traffic deaths and serious injuries.

The City of Oakland regularly ranks among the worst rates of pedestrian traffic deaths in the State of California. However, we have been making strides in implementing new treatments that we've evaluated and found to be effective in reducing dangerous behaviors that contribute to serious and fatal traffic injuries. The current draft MUTCD would expressly prohibit these lifesaving improvements, or makes them much more laborious to implement.

To date, the MUTCD has done little to help stem the approximately 40,000 traffic deaths the U.S. sees each year. This is due largely to the Manual's over-emphasis on motor vehicle operations and efficiency on rural highways, and neglect of other modes and contexts. To guide the development of an improved, safety-oriented document that supports the equity, safety, and sustainability vision of the Biden Administration, the City of Oakland would like to call attention to the following fundamental problems that must be addressed in an updated MUTCD:

- Continued reliance on the 85th percentile approach to setting speed limits over a safe systems approach.
- Traffic control devices appropriate for urban contexts, such as red transit lanes and pedestrian safety measures, are subject to high standards of testing, impeding progress toward urgent safety and sustainability goals.
- Culture-keeping strategies such as decorative crosswalks are expressly prohibited with no clear analysis of creative strategies that also advance safety and/or

- acknowledgment of the important community-serving role our public rights of way play.
- Outdated signal warrant requirements that ignore known conflicts and land use.
 - The draft 11th Edition of the MUTCD, released in December 2020, introduces new barriers to implementing environmentally responsible bicycle and transit infrastructure and does little to address existing ones.
 - Elements of the new draft, particularly a new section aimed at accommodating automated vehicles, exacerbate already prohibitive cost burdens for cities.

The issues described above are endemic to the document's underlying approach and undercut efforts to provide safe, multimodal accessibility in urban settings. The MUTCD needs holistic reframing to support cost-effective, sustainable, and equitable city street design and improve safety and accessibility for the most vulnerable users. We respectfully request that FHWA reframe and rewrite the MUTCD, creating a path for guidance that more closely aligns with the equity, safety, and sustainability goals of American cities, as well as those of the Biden Administration. The City of Oakland Department of Transportation stands ready to work with you.

Thank you,



Ryan Russo
Director