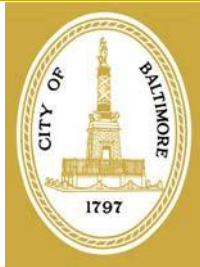


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CITY OF BALTIMORE  
BRANDON M. SCOTT, Mayor



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
Steve Sharkey, Director  
417 E. Fayette Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

April 16, 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 Baltimore City Department of Transportation respectfully **requests that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) reframe and rewrite the MUTCD, based on context-sensitive safety focused treatments.** Doing so will enable FHWA and the Biden-Harris Administration to make meaningful progress towards achieving greater equity and sustainability while reducing traffic deaths and serious injuries.

The Baltimore City Department of Transportation (BCDOT) has applied the MUTCD guidance in all of our projects and policies. However, each year, we still have over 20,000 reported crashes, 300 traffic related debilitating injuries, and 50 or more traffic-related fatalities. Baltimore has a Complete Streets Manual that guides engineers and planners to apply the current MUTCD in ways that rely on engineering judgment and may go against a strict interpretation of the MUTCD. This is not the way that the MUTCD should be viewed. We should not have to operate on the footnotes or exceptions that allow for engineering judgment in order to implement safety improvements. Cities need a document with direct, context-sensitive guidance, not just flexibility, in how to truly make an all-ages walkable network that is safe and serves our residents; not just those driving.

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. There are many parts to the MUTCD that are universal and should remain, like posting speed limits in 5 mph increments, providing signage guidance that is consistent no matter where you are in the country. But there are many parts to the manual that need to be changed based on context to promote safety. To guide the development of an improved, safety-oriented document that supports the equity, safety, and sustainability vision of the Biden Administration, the BCDOT would like to call attention to the following fundamental problems that must be addressed in an updated MUTCD:

- The document is written in a way that when flexibility is given to engineering judgement, engineers often ignore the engineering judgment part and defer to the standard without exception. This leads to thoughtless out-of-context decisions rather than thoughtful engineered solutions. The document should be written with guidance that is context sensitive, or

emphasizes that engineering judgment is paramount first, with the suggested guidelines following.

- This is critical for prioritizing safety and for advancing how traffic engineers throughout the country view and treat safety. Safety cannot just be following a Manual blindly; safety must be the focus of their job.
- Continued reliance on the 85th percentile approach to setting speed limits over a safe systems approach or an approach based on traffic stress including traffic volumes, traffic speeds, crossing distances, and adjacent land use context.
- Outdated signal warrant requirements that ignore known conflicts and land use and rely on reported crash data, which ignores the risk and safety of the crossing because people are deterred or unwilling to cross.
  - As an example, safe crossings should be provided at all intersections in a dense residential neighborhood in the city grid network. Traffic signals are often the only practicable measure to provide for this.
- 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.
- Traffic control devices appropriate for urban contexts, such as red transit lanes and pedestrian safety measures, are subject to high standards of testing.
- Artwork in intersections or in crosswalks is often a treatment that improves safety and gives streets a feeling of community. Guidance should be included that allows these rather than relying on a letter of interpretation.
- 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 MUTCD's underlying approach and undercut efforts to provide safe, multimodal accessibility in urban settings, which creates significant equity challenges for cities. 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-Harris Administration. The Baltimore City Department of Transportation stands ready to work with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Sharkey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steve" and last name "Sharkey" clearly legible.

Steve Sharkey  
Director