

LATOYA CANTRELL, MAYOR
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

March 11, 2021

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

RE: REQUEST FOR AN EXPEDITED REFRAMING OF THE MANUAL ON UNIFORM TRAFFIC CONTROL DEVICES (MUTCD), AS A PROACTIVE SAFETY REGULATION

Dear Acting Administrator Pollack:

The City of New Orleans respectfully requests that FHWA reframe and rewrite the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (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 and sustainability, while reducing traffic deaths and serious injuries.

Guided by the Moving New Orleans Transportation Action Plan, our City has been accelerating efforts to design and construct road projects built around the Action Plan's tenets of connectivity, efficiency, equity, and safety. As we implement our bikeway network plan, address systemic safety concerns, and build a framework for a Vision Zero commitment, we are too often finding that the MUTCD presents barriers to proven best practices, including those found in other resources endorsed by FHWA.

The Manual's over-emphasis on motor vehicle operations and efficiency on rural highways too often is not applicable to urban contexts like New Orleans and this neglect of other modes of transportation prevents cities from providing infrastructure that improves safety for the most vulnerable users. To guide the development of an improved, safety-oriented document that supports the equity, safety, and sustainability vision of the Biden Administration, we 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.
- Outdated signal warrant requirements that ignore known conflicts and land use.
- Traffic control devices appropriate for urban contexts, such as red transit lanes and pedestrian safety measures, are subject to high standards of testing.
- Elements of the new draft, particularly a new section aimed at accommodating automated vehicles, exacerbate already prohibitive cost burdens for cities.
- Overly restrictive language on aesthetic pavement and crosswalks treatments and the use of low-cost safety countermeasures including colored pavement to establish pedestrian islands.

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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 New Orleans, and our colleagues in cities across the country stand ready to work with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "LaToya Cantrell", is written over the printed name.

LaToya Cantrell

Mayor, City of New Orleans