



National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices

Chair's Message

MESSAGE 2022-#1
March 28 2022

Gene Hawkins
NCUTCD Chair

The NCUTCD was finally able to hold a face-to-face meeting in January! I'm getting out this Chair's Message due to activities related to my retirement from Texas A&M University, trying to avoid work-related activity during my short month off before starting my new responsibilities with Kittelson LLC in March, and waiting to execute a hotel contract for future Annual Meetings.

January Meeting Review

For the first time in two years, the NCUTCD met in person in January this year. We had 212 individuals attend our meeting, which is about two-thirds of our typical pre-pandemic attendance for a January meeting. The meeting was an overall success and served as a good transition from the virtual format we have used for the last two years to our preferred face-to-face format. It was also Richard Moeur's first face-to-face meeting as Executive Secretary and he did a great job dealing with all the details. Among the most significant activities of the meeting were the elections, Rules of the Road actions, and planning for the MUTCD 12th edition. Each of these is addressed in a section of this message.

NCUTCD Election Results

NCUTCD officers serve two-year terms and the elections are held during the January meeting in even-numbered years. All of the NCUTCD officers were re-elected to another term. The officers for the next two years are:

- Chair: Gene Hawkins
- Vice-Chair of Programs: Bill Lambert
- Vice-Chair of Research: Bryan Katz
- Treasurer: Kathy Falk

Rules of the Road Activity

As the Uniform Vehicle Code is referenced in the MUTCD but is no longer maintained by an organization, the NCUTCD Board created a ROR Joint Task Force to create a stand-alone document that brings MUTCD-related aspects of the UVC up-to-date. The plan is for the NCUTCD to eventually publish that document on its website. The stand-alone document will only address the rules of the road content from the UVC that relate to the MUTCD. The NCUTCD is not attempting to update the entire UVC.

During the January meeting, the NCUTCD Council approved text that will serve as the starting point for creating an NCUTCD Rules of the Road document. The January Council action essentially established a formal NCUTCD position that adopts selected UVC content related to the rules of the road in the 2000 UVC along with prior Council actions. Now that we have a base position, the ROR JTF will begin to evaluate the changes that are needed to bring MUTCD-related aspects of the ROR into agreement with current practices. The NCUTCD will not be publishing the stand-alone ROR document until we are much further down the road, although we will publish the individual Council actions on our website as we do for everything approved by Council.

The ROR JTF is chaired by Ronnie Bell and all of the technical committees are represented on the JTF. If you have traffic control device-related recommendations for the ROR JTF to consider, send them to Ronnie (contact info available by logging into the NCUTCD website).

12th Edition Planning

A significant portion of our January meeting was spent talking about plans for the 12th edition of the MUTCD, which is several years into the future. As there were numerous docket comments for the 11th edition NPA that suggested a need to “reframe and rewrite” the MUTCD, I encouraged the technical committee chairs to start their discussions for the 12th edition with a blank sheet of paper. The reports indicate that there were some very good discussions on the 12th edition in the technical committees. I will be working with the TC chairs this spring to make the January 2022 TC discussions available. We are also evaluating the potential for a webinar where the results of these discussions can be shared. Our discussions of the 12th edition will continue at the June 2022 meeting and likely the January 2023 meeting as well. Ultimately, I hope that we can publish an update and/or revision of our 2014 MUTCD 20-year Vision and Strategic Plan to help guide our deliberations when we start working on revisions to the 11th edition.

Future Meeting Plans

The next NCUTCD meeting will be the Midyear Meeting in Virginia Beach, VA. We originally planned to meet there in 2020 but we have postponed the meeting twice due to the pandemic. The Virginia Beach meeting will finally happen on June 15-17, 2022. Our meeting will be Wednesday-Friday, at the end of the same week as the AASHTO Traffic Engineering Committee. The Midyear Meeting will be a face-to-face meeting with no provisions for remote participation (see note below). Meeting and hotel registration information is posted on our website.

Due to the growth of the NCUTCD and a need for larger meeting spaces, the NCUTCD Executive Board directed the Executive Secretary to evaluate alternative meeting locations. Richard devoted significant effort to that process and recently signed a contract with the Double Tree Crystal City for future January meetings. The January meetings in 2023, 2024, and 2025 will be held on the Wednesday-Friday of the week of the TRB Annual Meetings in those years.

The location for our June 2023 meeting will be selected by the AASHTO CTE at their meeting this summer. It is expected to be in the state of Washington. We are hoping CTE will also select a host state for 2024 at their upcoming meeting.

During the next two meetings, the focus will be on planning for the 12th edition. There is no value in the NCUTCD advancing recommended changes to the 2009 MUTCD, as rulemaking is currently underway to replace that edition. And since the final rule has not been published, we have no official content upon which to base recommended changes for the 11th edition. The June 2022 and January 2023 meetings provide us an outstanding opportunity to look at the MUTCD from a strategic standpoint and define a long-term path for the document. This effort will also support a recent announcement from FHWA regarding the 12th edition (addressed later in this message)

During the run-up to the January 2022 meeting, Richard and I received several emails asking why we were not providing remote participation options for the meeting. The NCUTCD Executive Board has established a policy that the preferred NCUTCD meeting format is face-to-face. If conditions do not provide the ability to hold a face-to-face meeting, then the meeting will be 100 percent virtual. The reasons for this policy are numerous and include the following:

- Our consensus-building process is deliberative and requires discussion and input of many individuals. This free exchange of thoughts and ideas is best accomplished in a face-to-face environment.
- We do not want to adopt a hybrid meeting format (some in person and some remote) unless we can do it in a way that allows the same type of exchanges experienced in a face-to-face environment. In order to successfully embrace a hybrid meeting format, our meeting rooms would have to be set up in a manner that provides access to a microphone for each person in the room (nearly all of our technical committees have 40 or more members) and video that would show each person talking or presenting. Setting up a

phone or Zoom connection where remote participants can see a screen but not hear all of the physical attendees or not see those speaking is not an acceptable meeting format. If we were to adopt a hybrid format, then we want to do it right.

- We have previously solicited proposals to assess the cost of providing appropriate hybrid meeting capabilities and the costs are beyond NCUTCD's resources.
- Contracts with hotels generally require an organization to use hotel services for most of the AV and IT needs. Bandwidth and equipment access is part of the reason for the high cost of the hybrid meeting format.
- One element of our hotel contract is a guarantee of a set number of room-night reservations in the hotel. If we fail to meet our commitment, then the hotel charges us more for many different aspects of the meeting. If we adopt a hybrid meeting format, not only do we have greater costs for the AV/IT aspects, we would also have higher expenses in other areas due to the reduced number of room-night reservations.
- Public agency personnel may have difficulty getting permission to travel to a meeting if a hybrid meeting format is provided.
- I have encouraged the technical committee chairs to hold at least one virtual meeting between our in-person meetings. If your TC chair is not doing this, then encourage them to do so.
- A face-to-face meeting provides many more opportunities for discussion and interactions outside of the formal meeting time. These informal interactions have great value in identifying ideas for future MUTCD changes.

We certainly appreciate the thoughts and suggestions from our members as to the desire for a remote participation option for our meetings. The NPA experience proved that we can do work in a 100 percent virtual environment. As indicated above, we do our best work when we can look each other in the eyes. As such, all future NCUTCD meetings will be 100 percent face-to-face unless the Executive Board changes its position on the issue.

NCUTCD TCD Research Journal

At the January meeting, we announced the launch of the Journal for Traffic Control Device Research (JTCDR), which is being led by the Research Committee under Bryan Katz's leadership. The Journal will be maintained by the Research Committee and invites authors to submit technical papers and case studies for consideration in this inaugural journal. Unlike other journals with which you might be familiar, papers in this journal are intended for use by practitioners who are looking for evidence-based data to inform recommendations for the use of traffic control devices and changes to the MUTCD. Therefore, the focus will be on practices that provide direct input to MUTCD considerations and assist our technical committees who are considering new practices. For more information, please feel free to contact Bryan at bryan.katz@toxcel.com.

Future Leadership Opportunities

At the January meeting, Richard displayed a poster that listed over 20 NCUTCD members that have been active for 30+, 40+, 50+, and 60+ years. While the NCUTCD has had many members with years of NCUTCD experience, we are also attracting many new members. As our long-time members and leaders retire and/or move on to other responsibilities, we need our younger and mid-level members to step into leadership positions. I want to encourage our members to jump into leadership opportunities, whether it is with a task force, technical committee, or other opportunity. I also encourage our members to pursue new initiatives through their technical committees or NCUTCD officers when they have that new idea. I welcome suggestions from members who want to be more involved or want to identify an up-and-comer.

MUTCD Status: 11th Edition and Beyond

During the January meeting, we heard a report from FHWA that indicated work on the 11th edition is progressing and that there is support for the rulemaking from the highest levels of the FHWA and the USDOT. Due to the restrictions associated with federal rulemaking activities, the FHWA cannot share any more information about progress toward a final rule. It was noted that the IIJA includes language that establishes a May 15, 2023 deadline for the MUTCD revision. FHWA has also stated that over 35,000 unique comments were submitted within the 17,000+ docket submissions. Given that it took almost two years between the NPA and FR for the 2009 MUTCD and that the 11th edition NPA received over twice as many unique comments, the publications of a Final Rule for the 11th edition within 2½ years of the NPA would be very good news.

On March 2, the FHWA published a [news item on the MUTCD website](#) that reiterates the information shared with us in January. The message also indicates that FHWA plans to initiate activities to engage with the public about the future of the MUTCD beyond the 11th edition, which I believe will dovetail nicely with our own efforts regarding the 12th edition.