National Committee on
Uniform Traffic Control Devices

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Item Number: 26B-PED-02

NCUTCD PROPOSAL FOR CHANGES TO THE MANUAL ON UNIFORM TRAFFIC CONTROL DEVICES

COMMITTEE / TASK FORCE:	Pedestrian Joint Task Force
ITEM NUMBER:	26B-PED-02
TOPIC:	Definitions for Island
ORIGIN OF REQUEST:	Pedestrian JTF
AFFECTED SECTIONS OF MUTCD:	1C.02

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY:
Approved by Pedestrian JTF: 06/16/2026
Concurrence by Edit Committee:..... 06/24/2026
Approved by NCUTCD Council: .....

This is a proposed change to the MUTCD that has been developed by a technical committee, joint committee, or joint task force of the NCUTCD. The NCUTCD is distributing this to its sponsoring organizations for review and comment. Sponsor comments will be considered in revising the proposal prior to NCUTCD Council consideration. This proposal does not represent a revision of the MUTCD and does not constitute official MUTCD standards, guidance, options, or support. If approved by the NCUTCD Council, the recommended changes will be submitted to FHWA for consideration for inclusion in a future MUTCD revision. The MUTCD can be revised only through the federal rulemaking process.

SUMMARY:
The word “island” is inconsistently used in various contexts in the MUTCD. This proposal nests the terms used for island in Section 1C.02 definition #115 and adds definitions for terms utilized throughout the MUTCD in reference to islands.

DISCUSSION:
Island is referred to 224 times in the MUTCD. It is mentioned both stand-alone and modified for various applications that include:

- Central island
- Channelization island
- Channelizing island
- Divisional island
- Flush island
- Median island
- Painted island
- Pedestrian island
- Pedestrian refuge island
- Pedestrian refuge area
- Raised island
- Refuge island
- Splitter island
- Temporary raised island
- Traffic island
- Toll island
- Toll booth island
- Toll plaza island

This range of variations contributes to lack of consistent use and lack of uniformity. Only three islands had definition in the MUTCD: #115 Island, #252 Splitter Island and # 268 Toll Island.

A working group of the Pedestrian Joint Task Force is working on the topic of pedestrian refuge islands and uncovered the wide range of inconsistent use of terminology as part of work on a separate proposed change for future action. The effort to seek uniformity and consistency in the use of the term island in the MUTCD is being accomplished in two parts. This proposal focuses solely on the definition of "island" to seek concurrence on the proper terminologies and use of the term. A subsequent proposal, should this proposal be approved, will address each use of the 244 uses of the term "island" in the MUTCD to align them with the proposed definitions.

The need for accurate terminology is important as it improves uniform application of traffic control devices associated with islands. 20th century editions of the MUTCD had a Part 4 or 5 devoted to islands. In the 2000 Edition, the MUTCD stopped considering islands as a traffic control device. Even so, the application of traffic control devices such as markings, signs and signals can be common to islands. Of the 224 references to “island” in the MUTCD:

- 12 are in the table of contents referring to chapters, sections, figures and tables about islands
- 16 are in Part 1, of which 15 appear in the definitions section, including three definitions that specifically include the term island (island, splitter island and toll island)
- 47 are in Part 2
- 95 are in Part 3 which includes both a chapter (3J) and a section (3C.12) devoted to islands
- 16 are in Part 4 which has a reference to raised channelization (eight times in Section 4F.01 paragraph 03 for F.4., H.1. & H.2. and 4F.02 paragraph 05, 4F.09 paragraph 04)
- 14 are in Part 6 which includes a section (6M.03) and introduces the term traffic island
- 17 are in Part 8 which has several references to refuge areas and islands
- 7 are in Part 9

The various mentions of "island" in the MUTCD address design features of islands. These include the physical nature of the island (raised or flush), the position of the island (median or center for roundabouts) or its function (channelizing, refuge, or tolling). All other uses are repetitive and potentially confusing. For example, the use of “divisional island” (only used five times in Parts 1 and 2) could simply be replaced by “median island” which is used 37 times in the MUTCD and conveys the same meaning. "Divisional island" is a vestige of the 1988 MUTCD and earlier where it was defined. The inconsistent use of terms is likely from authors of previous editions using slightly different language in various Sections, Chapters, and Parts of the MUTCD without recognizing the variety of island types referenced elsewhere in the Manual.

The term "pedestrian refuge island" is used in many places (nearly three dozen) in the Manual in a variety of forms. PROWAG provides a definition for pedestrian refuge island in Section R104.3:

> *Pedestrian Refuge Island - A defined area 72 inches (1828 mm) long minimum in the direction of* pedestrian *travel located between traffic lanes for* pedestrian *refuge within a* median*,* splitter island*, or channelizing island.*

The use of this term is unique and separate from other island types. Some islands are not for pedestrian use (e.g., central island and some channelizing and median islands). Islands can be characterized into those where pedestrians may take refuge and those where they may not. Crossing islands involve use of traffic control devices to form an island that enhances identification of a crossing location (pedestrian and/or bicycle) and seeks to raise vehicle driver awareness of a crossing where the pedestrian crosses the full street, not taking refuge. It may be used as a traffic calming measure. Where crossing islands are used for the purpose of enhanced crossing identification and traffic calming, they are called out separately. Because "crossing island" is a new term, its application is limited in the MUTCD.

The term "splitter island" is defined in the Manual and used specifically in reference to roundabout approaches. In total, it is used four times in the MUTCD (twice in Section 2B.18 and once in 3D.03

beyond its use in its definition). It is a type of median island unique to roundabouts and the definition is retained as a nested definition under islands.

The term “channelization island” or “channelizing island” are both used in the MUTCD. Neither channelization or channelizing are defined in Section 1C.02 (only “channelizing line” #36). Channelization devices are noted in the definition of Traffic Control Devices and implies a wide range of traffic control devices (for example, pavement markings, tubular markers - this does not include islands by definition). The term channelization device only appears one other place in the MUTCD (for definition of signs #224). Channelization is mentioned 30 times in the MUTCD, mostly in Parts 6 (13 times) and Part 4 (6 times). However, channelizing devices is noted 212 times and channelizing by itself mentioned 281 times. Chapter 3I is devoted to “channelizing devices”.

The consistent term in this context is “channelizing”. The only exception would be uses of the word "channelization" that do not relate to devices or physical measures for uniformity. Of the 30 uses of the term "channelization" in the MUTCD, only eight should remain (Sections 2B.48 paragraph 02, 3B.24 paragraph 01, Figure 3J-6 title, 4C.01 paragraph 18 F., 6B.05 paragraph 03, 6C.02 paragraph 11 F., 6K.01 paragraph 4 twice). This would relate to the AASHTO definition for channelization. In Part 4, the reference to raised channelization should be changed to “markings or raised islands”.

For toll islands, those uses that include either the word booth or plaza would simply become toll islands. Text such as Section 3F.02 paragraph 06 that says “Toll booths and the islands on which they are located…” would become “Toll booths and Toll Islands…..”.

For the definitions of "island" being proposed, their current use in the MUTCD is:

- Central Island – 20 times
- Channelizing Island – 7 times
- Median Island – 37, Splitter island - 3
- Crossing island/Pedestrian Refuge Island (or variants) – 27
- Toll Island (or variants) – 11

Based upon this, it is proposed to:

1. Consolidate all island terms under the definition #115 for "island", retaining the MUTCD definitions (nesting types of islands under “island”).
2. Move the existing definitions in the Manual for Splitter Island (sub-nested) and Toll Island to #115.
3. Eliminate the term "divisional islands" by defining the term "median island".
4. Eliminate the one use of the term "traffic island" and replace it with "channelizing island".
5. Eliminate all but eight uses of the word "channelization" in the Manual and replace them with "channelizing".
6. Define Central Island (use AASHTO Transportation Glossary 2009 and NCHRP Report 1043).
7. Define "Channelizing Island" and change "channelization island" in Section 3B.13.
8. Terms such as "right-turn island" would be replaced with "channelizing island for right turns".
9. Standardize discussion of refuge islands, pedestrian islands and pedestrian median refuge islands or areas to simply Pedestrian Refuge Islands (using PROWAG Section R104.3 definition, and building from the AASHTO Transportation Glossary 2009 definition). This is placed under Crossing Islands.
10. Eliminate "painted island" and "flush median island" and replace with islands “designated only by pavement markings” using language from Section 3J.03 (found in Sections 3B.05, 9E.08 paragraph 04 & 05 for “painted” and Sections 3B.03 paragraph 09, 3B.13 paragraph 06, 3B.25 paragraph 01 & 06, 3B.31 paragraph 05, 3H.01 paragraph 03, 3H.04 paragraph 02, 3H.05 paragraph 02, 3J.03 paragraph 02 & 05, and Figures 3B-5 and 3H-3 for “flush”). This is needed to distinguish that raised island curbs and surfaces may be painted and that a median island may have channelizing devices
11. Move the description of "raised island" into the definition of Island.

RECOMMENDED MUTCD CHANGES:

The following present the proposed changes to the current MUTCD within the context of the current MUTCD language. Proposed additions to the MUTCD are shown in blue underline and proposed deletions from the MUTCD are shown in ~~red strikethrough~~. Changes previously approved by NCUTCD Council (but not yet adopted by FHWA) are shown in green double underline for additions and ~~green double strikethrough~~ for deletions. In some cases, background comments may be provided with the MUTCD text. These comments are indicated by [bracketed white text in shaded green]. Deletions made by a technical committee, joint committee, or task force after initial distribution to sponsoring organizations are shown in ~~highlighted red strikethrough and sans-serif text~~. Additions made by a technical committee, joint committee, or task force after initial distribution to sponsoring organizations are shown in underline blue and sans-serif text.

PART 1
GENERAL

CHAPTER 1C. DEFINITIONS, ACRONYMS, AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS MANUAL

[For brevity, only relevant excerpts of paragraph 03 are shown.]

Section 1C.02 Definitions of Words and Phrases Used in this Manual

Standard:

03 **The following words and phrases, when used in this Manual, shall have the following meanings:**

115. Island—a ~~defined~~ raised and/or marked area between traffic lanes ~~for control of~~ to direct vehicular movements, for toll collection, or ~~for~~ to enhance pedestrian and/or bicyclist ~~refuge~~ crossing. It includes all end protection and approach treatments. A raised island is physically above the roadway surface and is often curbed. In the vicinity of ~~Within~~ an intersection ~~area~~, a median or an outer separation is considered to be an island. Types of islands include:

(a) Central Island – an island surrounded by the circulating roadway of a roundabout. It can be partially or completely traversable by vehicles and does not need to be circular.

(b) Channelizing Island – an island where the traffic on both sides is from one approach direction. [Refer to Sections 3H.04 and 3H.05 for definitions of channelizing and median island already in the Manual. For reference. the AASHTO 2009 Transportation Glossary definition of Outer Separation is: "The portion of an arterial highway between the traveled ways of a roadway for through traffic and a frontage street or road."]

(c) Crossing Island – a channelizing or median island including a crosswalk and/or bicycle crossing that enhances the crossing location identification by vehicle drivers.

(1) Pedestrian Refuge Island – a crossing island for pedestrian refuge that is a minimum 6 feet long in the direction of pedestrian travel. [This definition is from PROWAG Section R104.3]

(d) Median Island – an island separating opposing directions of travel.

(1) Splitter Island - a median island used to separate opposing directions of traffic entering and exiting a roundabout. [Moved here from definition #268]

(e) Toll Island - a raised island on which a toll booth or other toll collection and related equipment are located. [Moved here from definition #252]

136. Median—the portion of a road ~~highway~~ separating opposing directions of ~~the~~ travel~~ed way~~ or the area between two continuous roadways of a divided road ~~highway~~ measured from edge of traveled way to edge of traveled way. The median excludes turn lanes. The median width might be different between intersections, interchanges, and at opposite approaches of the same intersection. [25A-EDT-01, June 2026]

145. Neutral Area—the paved area between the channelizing lines separating an entrance or exit ramp or a channelized turn lane or channelized entering lane from the adjacent through lane(s). [For reference]

161. Pedestrian—a person on foot, in a wheelchair, on ~~other devices determined by local law to be equivalent, which might include~~ skates, or on a skateboard. [24A-PED-01, June 2024. For reference]

164. Pedestrian Facility—a general term denoting a ~~location where improvements and~~ provision~~s~~, such as a sidewalk or pathway, ~~have been made to~~ that accommodates or encourages pedestrian activity. [25A-EDT-01, June 2026. For reference]

224. Sign—with regard to controlling traffic, any traffic control device that is intended to communicate specific information to road users through a word, symbol, and/or arrow legend. Signs do not include highway traffic signals, pavement markings, delineators, or ~~channelization~~ channelizing devices. Signs whose purpose is unrelated to traffic control are addressed in Section 1A.02.

252. Splitter Island— see Island.~~a median island used to separate opposing directions of traffic entering and exiting a roundabout.~~ [Definition moved to island #115]

268. Toll Island— see Island.~~a raised island on which a toll booth or other toll collection and related equipment are located.~~ [Definition moved to island #115]

273. Traffic Control Device—all signs, signals, markings, ~~channelization~~ channelizing devices, or other devices that use colors, shapes, symbols, words, sounds, and/or tactile information for the primary purpose of communicating a regulatory, warning, or guidance message to road users on ~~a street, highway, pedestrian facility, bikeway, pathway, or~~ all roads, including site road~~sway~~ open to public travel and bikeways. Section 1A.02 contains information regarding items that are not traffic control devices. [25A-EDT-01, June 2026. For reference]