National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices

RWSTC RECOMMENDATION FOLLOWING SPONSOR COMMENTS

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE: NCUTCD Regulatory/Warning Signs Technical Committee

DATE OF ACTION: (TASK FORCE): May 14, 2010
RWSTC APPROVAL DATE: June 30, 2010
TRANSMITTAL TO SPONSORS DATE: October 28, 2010
RWSTC APPROVAL FOLLOWING SPONSOR COMMENTS: January 19, 2011
COUNCIL APPROVAL DATE: 1-20-11

TOPIC: Thru Traffic Merge Left (Right)

AFFECTED PORTIONS OF MUTCD: Section 2C.XX Figure 2C-8, Table 2C-1 and Table 2C-2 (2009 MUTCD)

DISCUSSION:

The Synthesis of Non-MUTCD Signing identified seventy-four signs or categories of signs that are not in the MUTCD but were in common use by various States, local governments and Canada. The Synthesis of Non-MUTCD Signing recommended that these signs be considered for inclusion in the MUTCD. Thirty-one of these signs were Warning Signs. The Regulatory and Warning Sign Technical Committee (RWSTC) reviewed these signs in June 2006. The RSWTC recommended that thirteen of these signs or sets of signs be included in the MUTCD. One of these thirteen signs was the THRU TRAFFIC MERGE LEFT (RIGHT) sign shown below.

At least 11 States routinely use supplemental warning signs approaching lane drops to warn thru traffic (i.e., traffic not exiting at the next interchange or turning at the next
intersection) to “merge left” (or right). States also use this sign to advise motorists to leave congested lanes at interchanges.

The W4-7 THRU TRAFFIC MERGE LEFT (RIGHT) sign was in Part 6 Temporary Traffic Control (Table 6F-1, Figure 6F-4 and Section 6F.23) of the 2003 MUTCD.

The THRU TRAFFIC MERGE LEFT (RIGHT) sign (W4-7) was approved by Council on June 21, 2007 and was included in the December 2007 NPA in Section 2C.41, Figure 2C-8, Table 2C-1 and Table 2C-2.

The sign was eliminated from the 2009 MUTCD. Section 140 of the December 2009 Final Rule states “In Section 2C.42 Lane Ends Signs (Section 2C.33 of the 2003 MUTCD), the FHWA proposed in the NPA to allow the use of the W4–7 THRU TRAFFIC MERGE RIGHT (LEFT) sign, as a supplement to other signs, to warn road users in the right or left lane that their lane is about to become a mandatory turn or exit lane. ATSSA and the NCUTCD supported this new sign; however, a local DOT suggested that an additional sign is not needed, because the existing W9–1 and W9–2 Series signs already serve this purpose. The FHWA agrees and does not adopt the proposed use of this sign in this final rule. The FHWA believes this sign legend can be confusing when there are more than two through lanes. Instead, the FHWA adds a GUIDANCE statement in Section 2C.42 in this final rule to recommend the use of the RIGHT (LEFT) LANE ENDS (W9–1) adjacent to the Lane-Reduction Arrow pavement markings. The FHWA also clarifies the application of the W4–2, W9–1, and W9–2 warning signs in this final rule by adding a STANDARD statement prohibiting their use where a thru lane is designated as a mandatory turning lane approaching an intersection. The FHWA adopts these changes to be consistent with changes adopted in Sections 2B.20 and 3B.04. The FHWA retains the current use of the W4–7 sign for temporary conditions in Part 6.”

The last sentence of Section 140 of the December 16, 2009 Final Rule appears to be in error. The THRU TRAFFIC MERGE LEFT (RIGHT) sign (W4-7) does not appear to be in Table 6F-1, Figure 6F-4 or any Section of Part 6F of the 2009 MUTCD. Its deletion from Part 6F does not appear to have been addressed in the December 16, 2009 Final Rule.

While many States use supplemental signs to warn of lane drops at interchanges and intersections the Final Rule takes the position that the proposed sign may be confusing when there are more than two thru lanes and that the W4-2, W9-1 and W9-2 signs as proposed in the Final Rule are adequate without the proposed sign.

According to Section 2C.42 of 2009 MUTCD, the LANE ENDS MERGE LEFT (RIGHT) (W9-2) sign or the Lane Ends (W4-2) sign should be used to warn of the reduction in the number of traffic lanes in the direction of travel on a multi-lane highway. The RIGHT (LEFT) LANE ENDS (W9-1) sign may then be used in advance of the Lane Ends (W4-2) sign or the LANE ENDS MERGE LEFT (RIGHT) (W9-2) sign as additional warning or to emphasize that the traffic lane is ending and that a merging maneuver will be required. So when additional emphasis is needed, both signs are to be
used and the RIGHT (LEFT) LANE ENDS (W9-1) sign becomes the supplemental sign rather than the originally proposed THRU TRAFFIC MERGE LEFT (RIGHT) sign.

Since this sign was proposed as a supplement, the RWSTC cannot argue with the position that another supplemental sign is necessarily better than the proposed signing and pavement markings used to address the situation.

The RWSTC has always felt that one of the primary uses of this sign is to advise motorists to leave congested lanes on multilane approaches to interchanges, intersections and other congested areas. In these situations, the lane is not ending, so the W4-2, W9-1 and W9-2 signs are not appropriate. The message is frequently used at special events on VMS. There is a need to address this phenomenon at locations where congestion clogs the left or right lane approach lane on a regular basis.

The RWSTC proposes resubmitting this sign for use at multilane approaches to congested locations to advise motorists to leave the congested lane. It would be appropriate regardless of the number of approach lanes. Since it is not being used in conjunction with a lane ending, it would now be in a new Section.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Add Section 2C.XX, add to Table 2C-1, Table 2C-2 and Figure 2C-8

**Note:** Proposed changes to the MUTCD are shown in *underline red* and removed text are shown in **strikethrough red.**

**RECOMMENDED WORDING:**

Section 2C.XX THRU TRAFFIC MERGE LEFT (RIGHT) Sign (W4-7)

**Option:**

The THRU TRAFFIC MERGE LEFT (RIGHT) (W4-7) sign (see Figure 2C-8) may be used at multilane approaches to congested areas to inform road users that it is desirable for thru traffic to move out of a lane that will be occupied by large volumes of entering or exiting traffic.

RWSTC VOTE: For: 19

Opposed 2

Abstentions: 1

Approved

VOTE: COUNCIL For: Unanimous

APPROVED January 2011
C:ncutcd/January 2011/RW # 4 agenda IV.4 resubmitThruTrafficMergeLeft (right) 6-30-10, revised 1-19-11, revised 1-20-11