TECHNICAL COMMITTEE: Edit Committee

STATUS/DATE OF ACTION:

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TOPIC: Traffic Control Device Definition

SUMMARY: The traffic control device definition was initially defined in the 1942 MUTCD as “all signs, signals, markings and devices placed or erected by authority of a public body or official having jurisdiction, for the purpose of regulating, warning or guiding traffic”.
This definition was retained in the 1948, 1961, 1971 Manual definitions and the Introduction to the 1978 and 1988 Manuals. The 2000 Manual established the definition as a Standard and defined as: “a sign, signal, marking, or other device used to regulate, warn, or guide traffic, placed on, over, or adjacent to a street, highway, pedestrian facility, or bicycle path by authority of a public agency having jurisdiction”.

The 2003 MUTCD replaced the “bicycle path” with “shared-use path”. The 2009 MUTCD modified the definition by revising the text to address private roads so the definition now reads as: “a sign, signal, marking, or other device used to regulate, warn, or guide traffic, placed on, over, or adjacent to a street, highway, pedestrian facility, or shared-use path by authority of a public agency or official having jurisdiction, or, in the case of a private road open to public travel, by authority of the private owner or private official having jurisdiction.”

There has been extensive discussion on what “other devices” included in the MUTCD are to be considered as traffic control devices. In a limited number of cases, it has been determined in the MUTCD text that the specific item, although mentioned in the Manual, is not a traffic control device. Attempts to segregate other devices into either being a traffic control device or not being a traffic control device has not been successful. There is general agreement on a selective number of other devices mentioned in the Manual that they are not traffic control devices. It was decided that a more global definition was needed to encompass the existing devices, recognize future technological developments and provide a basis interpretation of the device status.
DISCUSSION:

The revised definition is shown below with the following explanation of the recommended revisions:

1. Signs, signals, markings, Channelizing devices added at the request of the channelizing devices
   Markings Tech Comm and concurred in by the majority of the Edit Committee.

2. other devices
   Other words such as means, methods, measures have also been considered but rejected.

3. primary purpose of
   States the purpose of the device or other measure communicating

4. regulatory, warning, or guidance
   Editorial change to maintain the correct structure of message to traffic road user
   traffic=conveyance.

5. placed on, over or adjacent
   Deleted as unnecessary since placement does not define a traffic control device.

6. street
   Deleted defined under highway

7. highway, pedestrian facility, Bikeway replaces shared-use path
   bikeway, or private road open to public travel

8. that uses colors, shapes, symbols words, sounds or tactile information
   Added to cover the method of communication and expanded to cover sound and feel because of ADA provisions and future technological advances.

9. by authority of a public agency or official having jurisdiction, or in the case of a private road open to public travel, by authority of the private owner or private official having jurisdiction
   Deleted since this authority is covered in Section 1A.08.

10. Infrastructure elements that restrict the road user’s travel path or vehicle speeds, such as curbs, speed humps, and other raised roadway surfaces, are not traffic control devices.
    Added to clarify infrastructure items that are not considered to be traffic control devices and to provide a basis for interpretation of similar items added to the Manual in the future.

11. Operational devices associated with the application of traffic control strategies and traffic control devices, such as in-vehicle electronics, fencing, roadway lighting, barriers, and attenuation devices are shown in the Manual for convenience but their design, application, and usage
    Added to clarify operational devices that are not traffic control devices and to provide a basis for interpretation of similar items added to the
are not specified in the Manual since they are not traffic control devices.

RECOMMENDED MUTCD PROVISIONS/REVISIONS:
It is recommended that the following revisions shown in red to the Manual Introduction

Standard:
Traffic Control Devices shall be defined as all signs, signals, markings, channelizing devices and/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, placed on, over, or adjacent to a street, on a highway, pedestrian facility, bikeway, pathway, or private road open to public travel. (see definition in Section 1A.13) by authority of a public agency or official having jurisdiction, or, in the case of a private road, by authority of the private owner or private official having jurisdiction.—

And Section 1A.13 Definitions of Headings, Words and Phrases in this Manual

238. Traffic Control Device- a sign, signal, marking, channelizing device 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 traffic, placed on, over, or adjacent to a street, on a highway, private road open to public travel, pedestrian facility, or shared-use path bikeway, pathway or private road open to public travel, by authority of a public agency or official having jurisdiction, or, in the case of a private road open to public travel, by authority of the private owner or private official having jurisdiction. Infrastructure elements that restrict the road user’s travel paths or vehicle speeds, such as curbs, speed humps, and other raised roadway surfaces, are not traffic control devices. Operational devices associated with the application of traffic control strategies such as in-vehicle electronics, fencing, roadway lighting, barriers, and attenuators are shown in the Manual for convenience but their design, application, and usage are not specified since they are not traffic control devices.