



National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices

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

COMMITTEE / TASK FORCE: Edit Committee
ITEM NUMBER: 26A-EDT-01
TOPIC: Definition of "Plaque"
ORIGIN OF REQUEST: Edit Committee
AFFECTED SECTIONS OF MUTCD: 1C.02

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY:

Approved by Edit Committee: 05/19/2026
Approved by NCUTCD Council: 06/25/2026

This is a recommended change to the MUTCD that has been approved by the NCUTCD Council. This proposal does not represent a revision of the MUTCD and does not constitute official MUTCD standards, guidance, or options. It 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 MUTCD has conflicting provisions about whether plaques are considered a subset of signs or an entirely separate category of traffic control devices. Most usage in the MUTCD implies that a plaque is a type of sign. The definition of *plaque* is proposed to be changed to clarify that a plaque is a type of sign, which will eliminate the conflicts.

DISCUSSION:

Plaque was first defined in the 2009 Edition of the MUTCD, and its definition is unchanged in the 11th Edition:

173. Plaque—a traffic control device intended to communicate specific information to road users through a word, symbol, or arrow legend that is placed immediately adjacent to a sign to supplement the message on the sign. The difference between a plaque and a sign is that a plaque cannot be used alone. The designation for a plaque includes a “P” suffix.

According to this definition, a plaque is **not** a sign. The definition mentions “the difference between a plaque and a sign...” If plaques were considered signs, this would instead say, “the difference between a plaque and another type of sign...” The definition says that plaques are used next to signs, but a plaque alone is not itself a sign.

However, the definition of *sign* is as follows:

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 devices.

This word was first defined in the Millennium Edition of the MUTCD, the first that included a list of definitions in Part 1. The 11th Edition definition is substantively identical to the Millennium Edition. According to the definition, a sign is **any** traffic control device that has a word, symbol or arrow legend. Plaques meet this definition. Therefore, the definitions of *plaque* and *sign* conflict with each other in whether plaques are signs.

One option to address the conflict might be to clarify in the definition of *sign* that plaques are expressly excluded, just as signals, markings, and delineators are expressly excluded. This would make the two definitions consistent with each other. However, many provisions in the MUTCD are written as though the word *sign* includes plaques. Following are some examples:

- Paragraph 2 of Sec. 1A.05 says, “The ‘Standard Highway Signs’ publication includes standard alphabets and symbols and arrows for signs and pavement markings.” SHS addresses both signs and plaques. If plaques are not signs, then plaques should be mentioned separately.
- *Sign assembly* means “a group of signs, located on the same support(s), that supplement one another in conveying information to road users.” This definition includes only signs, not plaques. If a sign post supports both a sign and a plaque, apparently only the sign meets this definition.
- The definition of *signing* is: “individual signs or a group of signs, not necessarily on the same support(s), that supplement one another in conveying information to road users.” The term *signing* only includes signs, not plaques. If there is a plaque mixed in, the plaque apparently isn’t considered part of the signing.
- Paragraph 1 of Sec. 2A.01 says: “This Manual contains Standards, Guidance, and Options for the signing of all types of highways, and site roadways open to public travel. The functions of signs are to provide regulations, warnings, and guidance information for road users. Words, symbols, and arrows are used to convey the messages.” As discussed above, if plaques are not signs, then the concept of “signing” does not include plaques. It seems that this paragraph should apply to plaques.

Because so much MUTCD content implies that plaques are a type of sign, rather than a different type of device, this proposal recommends modifying the definition of *plaque* to clarify that a plaque is “a type of sign.”

The MUTCD frequently uses phrases such as “signs and plaques” that imply that plaques and signs are different types of devices. Following are examples:

- Paragraph 30 of Sec. 2B.21 is a support statement referring readers to other sections for information about “advisory speed signs and plaques.” This statement is technically correct whether or not a plaque is a sign, but if a plaque is a sign, it would not be necessary to mention plaques. Or, if the word *plaque* is determined to be needed, the provision could be worded to refer to “advisory speed signs, including plaques.”
- Most sign size tables (such as Table 2D-1) have “Sign and Plaque Sizes” in their titles. The word *plaque* would not be needed if a plaque is a type of sign, but using *plaque* is not technically incorrect because the tables do provide information about both signs and plaques.

Changes to other MUTCD content do not appear to be essential to redefine *plaque* as proposed, although future editors of the MUTCD may wish to be more precise with phrases such as “signs and plaques” to avoid the perception that plaques are a different kind of device than signs.

A subsequent NCUTCD proposal will address uniformity in terms such as “auxiliary plaque” and “supplemental plaque.”

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.

PART 1

GENERAL

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

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

For brevity, only the relevant paragraphs and definitions are shown.

Standard:

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

170. **Plaque**—a type of sign ~~traffic control device intended to communicate specific information to road users through a word, symbol, or arrow legend that is~~ placed ~~immediately adjacent to~~ above or below a sign that is not a plaque to supplement ~~the~~ its message ~~on the sign~~. ~~The difference between a plaque and a sign is that a~~ A plaque cannot be used alone. The sign designation for a plaque includes a “P” suffix. [It is not necessary to include “communicate specific information to road users through a word, symbol, or arrow legend” in the definition of *plaque*, because this phrase is already part of the definition of *sign*. Since a plaque is proposed to be a type of sign, this phrase would apply to plaques just as it does to all other types of signs.]

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 devices. Signs whose purpose is unrelated to traffic control are addressed in Section 1A.02.