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TO: Region Engineers

ATTN: Region Pre-Construction & Area Operation, Construction, and Local Transportation Engineers

FROM: Winston J. Powe, PE
State Construction Engineer

RE: Section 742 – Portable Changeable Message Signs (PCMSs)

Annual TCP Reviews and project site visits continually find PCMSs that duplicate messages from the static work zone signs or do not relay any pertinent information to the traveling public. As a result, this CIM is to provide guidance on proper usage of PCMS and emphasize the need for appropriate messages in construction work zones.

When setting up PCMSs on construction projects during plan development or by supplemental agreement, all parties involved shall reference and be familiar with Section 742 of the Standard Specifications, Special Drawing PCMS-710 Index Numbers 1239, 1240, and 1241 and Section 6F.60 of the MUTCD. Special Drawing PCMS-710 provides placement details regarding how to correctly delineate the device, font requirements, display requirements, and the number of messages per phase that can be used. Section 6F.60 (attached) outlines guidance on the possible applications of PCMSs including roadway, lane, or ramp closures; incident management; width restriction information; speed control or reductions; advisories on work scheduling; road user management and diversion; warning of adverse conditions or special events; and other operational control.

To determine if the PCMS will provide a benefit to the motorists, the type of roadway as well as the scope of work should be reviewed. A PCMS is significantly higher in cost than the Construction Signs pay item, thus the use of a PCMS should only be added if the message or messages that will be used will convey new or additional information that cannot be addressed by the static work zone signs. Considering the information above and the cost, PCMSs are only recommended on high speed or high volume 4-Lane roadways and 2-Lane projects where the scope of work includes traffic impacts such as on-site diversions, barrier rail, or other traffic impacts or potential safety issues. They are not recommended for warning of flagmen ahead, which should use normal

advance warning signage. As much as the road geometrics will allow, a flagger should be placed in locations with adequate sight distance. Furthermore, they are not recommended on resurfacing projects for multi-lane, non-interstate roadways in urban areas where there are numerous sideroads and driveways. The work for these projects is normally typical, and the numerous access points and commercial development minimize the benefit of the PCMSs at each end of the project.

If the messages for the PCMSs are not included in the plans, the Project Manager should discuss with the Area Construction Engineer and Area Traffic Engineer to determine the appropriate messages to be used. The following are messages that have been commonly used but should ***NOT*** be allowed since they either duplicate messages from the static work zone signs or do not relay any pertinent information to the traveling public:

CAUTION ROAD WORK AHEAD
USE EXTREME CAUTION
ROAD WORK AHEAD
CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION

Once installed on the project, PCMSs shall be maintained by the Contractor in accordance with Article 742.04 of the Standard Specifications as well as using guidance from the 2017 ATSSA Quality Guide and ALDOT's Traffic Control Device Quality Guide.

Please note that special attention shall be given to Note 3 from Special Drawing PCMS 710, Index 1239, which reads "PCMS Signs should not be gate posted, but if the need arises, one of the PCMSs shall have a static message."

These special drawings will be formally included in future plans via Special Project Detail and the 2020 Standard and Special Drawing Book as outlined in the attached memorandum from the Design Bureau. However, the recommended phases and formats of messages can be implemented on all active projects utilizing PCMSs

Please ensure that your Designers and Project Managers are familiar with this CIM.

WJP/JLB/GDS/DJD/djd
Attachments
pc: Mr. George Conner
Mr. William Adams
Mr. Ed Phillips
Mr. Clay McBrien
ARBA
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Section 6F.57 END ROAD WORK Sign (G20-2)

Guidance:

01 *When used, the END ROAD WORK (G20-2) sign (see Figure 6F-4) should be placed near the downstream end of the termination area, as determined by engineering judgment.*

Option:

02 The END ROAD WORK sign may be installed on the back of a warning sign facing the opposite direction of road users or on the back of a Type 3 Barricade.

Section 6F.58 PILOT CAR FOLLOW ME Sign (G20-4)

Standard:

01 **The PILOT CAR FOLLOW ME (G20-4) sign (see Figure 6F-4) shall be mounted in a conspicuous position on the rear of a vehicle used for guiding one-way vehicular traffic through or around a TTC zone (see Section 6C.13).**

Section 6F.59 Detour Signs (M4-8, M4-8a, M4-8b, M4-9, M4-9a, M4-9b, M4-9c, and M4-10)

Standard:

01 **Each detour shall be adequately marked with standard temporary route signs and destination signs.**

Option:

02 Detour signs in TTC incident management situations may have a black legend and border on a fluorescent pink background.

03 The Detour Arrow (M4-10) sign (see Figure 6F-5) may be used where a detour route has been established.

04 The DETOUR (M4-8) sign (see Figure 6F-5) may be mounted at the top of a route sign assembly to mark a temporary route that detours from a highway, bypasses a section closed by a TTC zone, and rejoins the highway beyond the TTC zone.

Guidance:

05 *The Detour Arrow (M4-10) sign should normally be mounted just below the ROAD CLOSED (R11-2, R11-3a, or R11-4) sign. The Detour Arrow sign should include a horizontal arrow pointed to the right or left as required.*

06 *The DETOUR (M4-9) sign (see Figure 6F-5) should be used for unnumbered highways, for emergency situations, for periods of short durations, or where, over relatively short distances, road users are guided along the detour and back to the desired highway without route signs.*

07 *A Street Name sign should be placed above, or the street name should be incorporated into, a DETOUR (M4-9) sign to indicate the name of the street being detoured.*

Option:

08 The END DETOUR (M4-8a) or END (M4-8b) sign (see Figure 6F-5) may be used to indicate that the detour has ended.

Guidance:

09 *When the END DETOUR sign is used on a numbered highway, the sign should be mounted above a route sign after the downstream end of the detour.*

10 *The Pedestrian/Bicycle Detour (M4-9a) sign (see Figure 6F-5) should be used where a pedestrian/bicycle detour route has been established because of the closing of a pedestrian/bicycle facility to through traffic.*

Standard:

11 **If used, the Pedestrian/Bicycle Detour sign shall have an arrow pointing in the appropriate direction.**

Option:

12 The arrow on a Pedestrian/Bicycle Detour sign may be on the sign face or on a supplemental plaque.

13 The Pedestrian Detour (M4-9b) sign or Bicycle Detour (M4-9c) sign (see Figure 6F-5) may be used where a pedestrian or bicycle detour route (not both) has been established because of the closing of the pedestrian or bicycle facility to through traffic.

Section 6F.60 Portable Changeable Message Signs

Support:

01 Portable changeable message signs (PCMS) are TTC devices installed for temporary use with the flexibility to display a variety of messages. In most cases, portable changeable message signs follow the same provisions for design and application as those given for changeable message signs in Chapter 2L. The information in this Section describes situations where the provisions for portable changeable message signs differ from those given in Chapter 2L.

02 Portable changeable message signs are used most frequently on high-density urban freeways, but have applications on all types of highways where highway alignment, road user routing problems, or other pertinent conditions require advance warning and information.

03 Portable changeable message signs have a wide variety of applications in TTC zones including: roadway, lane, or ramp closures; incident management; width restriction information; speed control or reductions; advisories on work scheduling; road user management and diversion; warning of adverse conditions or special events; and other operational control.

04 The primary purpose of portable changeable message signs in TTC zones is to advise the road user of unexpected situations. Portable changeable message signs are particularly useful as they are capable of:

A. Conveying complex messages,
B. Displaying real time information about conditions ahead, and
C. Providing information to assist road users in making decisions prior to the point where actions must be taken.

05 Some typical applications include the following:

A. Where the speed of vehicular traffic is expected to drop substantially;
B. Where significant queuing and delays are expected;
C. Where adverse environmental conditions are present;
D. Where there are changes in alignment or surface conditions;
E. Where advance notice of ramp, lane, or roadway closures is needed;
F. Where crash or incident management is needed; and/or
G. Where changes in the road user pattern occur.

Guidance:

06 *The components of a portable changeable message sign should include: a message sign, control systems, a power source, and mounting and transporting equipment. The front face of the sign should be covered with a protective material.*

Standard:

07 **Portable changeable message signs shall comply with the applicable design and application principles established in Chapter 2A. Portable changeable message signs shall display only traffic operational, regulatory, warning, and guidance information, and shall not be used for advertising messages.**

Support:

08 Section 2L.02 contains information regarding overly simplistic or vague messages that is also applicable to portable changeable message signs.

Standard:

09 **The colors used for legends on portable changeable message signs shall comply with those shown in Table 2A-5.**

Support:

10 Section 2L.04 contains information regarding the luminance, luminance contrast, and contrast orientation that is also applicable to portable changeable message signs.

Guidance:

11 *Portable changeable message signs should be visible from 1/2 mile under both day and night conditions.*

Support:

12 Section 2B.13 contains information regarding the design of portable changeable message signs that are used to display speed limits that change based on operational conditions, or are used to display the speed at which approaching drivers are traveling.

Guidance:

13 *A portable changeable message sign should be limited to three lines of eight characters per line or should consist of a full matrix display.*

14 *Except as provided in Paragraph 15, the letter height used for portable changeable message sign messages should be a minimum of 18 inches.*

Option:

15 For portable changeable message signs mounted on service patrol trucks or other incident response vehicles, a letter height as short as 10 inches may be used. Shorter letter sizes may also be used on a portable changeable message sign used on low speed facilities provided that the message is legible from at least 650 feet.

16 The portable changeable message sign may vary in size.

Guidance:

17 *Messages on a portable changeable message sign should consist of no more than two phases, and a phase should consist of no more than three lines of text. Each phase should be capable of being understood by itself, regardless of the order in which it is read. Messages should be centered within each line of legend. If more than one portable changeable message sign is simultaneously legible to road users, then only one of the signs should display a sequential message at any given time.*

Support:

18 Road users have difficulties in reading messages displayed in more than two phases on a typical three-line portable changeable message sign.

Standard:

19 **Techniques of message display such as animation, rapid flashing, dissolving, exploding, scrolling, travelling horizontally or vertically across the face of the sign, or other dynamic elements shall not be used.**

Guidance:

20 *When a message is divided into two phases, the display time for each phase should be at least 2 seconds, and the sum of the display times for both of the phases should be a maximum of 8 seconds.*

21 *All messages should be designed with consideration given to the principles provided in this Section and also taking into account the following:*

A. The message should be as brief as possible and should contain three thoughts (with each thought preferably shown on its own line) that convey:

1. The problem or situation that the road user will encounter ahead,
2. The location of or distance to the problem or situation, and
3. The recommended driver action.

B. If more than two phases are needed to display a message, additional portable changeable message signs should be used. When multiple portable changeable message signs are needed, they should be placed on the same side of the roadway and they should be separated from each other by a distance of at least 1,000 feet on freeways and expressways, and by a distance of at least 500 feet on other types of highways.

Standard:

22 **When the word messages shown in Tables 1A-1 or 1A-2 need to be abbreviated on a portable changeable message sign, the provisions described in Section 1A.15 shall be followed.**

23 **In order to maintain legibility, portable changeable message signs shall automatically adjust their brightness under varying light conditions.**

24 **The control system shall include a display screen upon which messages can be reviewed before being displayed on the message sign. The control system shall be capable of maintaining memory when power is unavailable.**

25 **Portable changeable message signs shall be equipped with a power source and a battery back-up to provide continuous operation when failure of the primary power source occurs.**

26 **The mounting of portable changeable message signs on a trailer, a large truck, or a service patrol truck shall be such that the bottom of the message sign shall be a minimum of 7 feet above the roadway in urban areas and 5 feet above the roadway in rural areas when it is in the operating mode.**

Guidance:

27 *Portable changeable message signs should be used as a supplement to and not as a substitute for conventional signs and pavement markings.*

28 *When portable changeable message signs are used for route diversion, they should be placed far enough in advance of the diversion to allow road users ample opportunity to perform necessary lane changes, to adjust their speed, or to exit the affected highway.*

29 *Portable changeable message signs should be sited and aligned to provide maximum legibility and to allow time for road users to respond appropriately to the portable changeable message sign message.*

30 *Portable changeable message signs should be placed off the shoulder of the roadway and behind a traffic barrier, if practical. Where a traffic barrier is not available to shield the portable changeable message sign, it should be placed off the shoulder and outside of the clear zone. If a portable changeable message sign has to be placed on the shoulder of the roadway or within the clear zone, it should be delineated with retroreflective TTC devices.*

31 *When portable changeable message signs are used in TTC zones, they should display only TTC messages.*

32 *When portable changeable message signs are not being used to display TTC messages, they should be relocated such that they are outside of the clear zone or shielded behind a traffic barrier and turned away from traffic. If relocation or shielding is not practical, they should be delineated with retroreflective TTC devices.*

33 *Portable changeable message sign trailers should be delineated on a permanent basis by affixing retroreflective material, known as conspicuity material, in a continuous line on the face of the trailer as seen by oncoming road users.*

Section 6F.61 Arrow Boards

Standard:

01 **An arrow board shall be a sign with a matrix of elements capable of either flashing or sequential displays. This sign shall provide additional warning and directional information to assist in merging and controlling road users through or around a TTC zone.**

Guidance:

02 *An arrow board in the arrow or chevron mode should be used to advise approaching traffic of a lane closure along major multi-lane roadways in situations involving heavy traffic volumes, high speeds, and/or limited sight distances, or at other locations and under other conditions where road users are less likely to expect such lane closures.*

03 *If used, an arrow board should be used in combination with appropriate signs, channelizing devices, or other TTC devices.*

04 *An arrow board should be placed on the shoulder of the roadway or, if practical, farther from the traveled lane. It should be delineated with retroreflective TTC devices. When an arrow board is not being used, it should be removed; if not removed, it should be shielded; or if the previous two options are not feasible, it should be delineated with retroreflective TTC devices.*

Standard:

05 **Arrow boards shall meet the minimum size, legibility distance, number of elements, and other specifications shown in Figure 6F-6.**

Support:

06 Type A arrow boards are appropriate for use on low-speed urban streets. Type B arrow boards are appropriate for intermediate-speed facilities and for maintenance or mobile operations on high-speed roadways. Type C arrow boards are intended to be used on high-speed, high-volume motor vehicle traffic control projects. Type D arrow boards are intended for use on vehicles authorized by the State or local agency.

Standard:

07 **Type A, B, and C arrow boards shall have solid rectangular appearances. A Type D arrow board shall conform to the shape of the arrow.**

08 **All arrow boards shall be finished in non-reflective black. The arrow board shall be mounted on a vehicle, a trailer, or other suitable support.**

Guidance:

09 *The minimum mounting height, measured vertically from the bottom of the board to the roadway below it or to the elevation of the near edge of the roadway, of an arrow board should be 7 feet , except on vehicle-mounted arrow boards, which should be as high as practical.*

10 *A vehicle-mounted arrow board should be provided with remote controls.*

Standard:

11 **Arrow board elements shall be capable of at least a 50 percent dimming from full brilliance. The dimmed mode shall be used for nighttime operation of arrow boards.**

Guidance:

12 *Full brilliance should be used for daytime operation of arrow boards.*

Standard:

13 **The arrow board shall have suitable elements capable of the various operating modes. The color presented by the elements shall be yellow.**

Guidance:

14 *If an arrow board consisting of a bulb matrix is used, the elements should be recess-mounted or equipped with an upper hood of not less than 180 degrees.*