



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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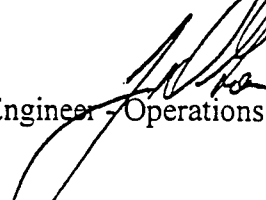
DAVID MCCOY  
SECRETARY

November 6, 2000

MEMORANDUM TO: Division Engineers

FROM: J. D. Goins, P.E., Chief Engineer - Operations

SUBJECT: "Inactive" Work Zones



There is a growing concern and "perception" by the public that in some work zones minimal roadway work is being performed compared to the amount of work zone signing present across our state and the nation. This issue is a national one, and we are going to take measures to lead the country in ensuring the credibility and safety in our work zones. The number one complaint is observing stationary work zone signs with no visible work or workers in the work zone. In an effort to curb this "inactive work zone" perception, we are addressing the "high visibility roadways" first, all Interstate and US Route (C/A) freeways will be the priority with the remaining types of facilities to be phased in at a later time. Eventually, all "inactive" work zones will adopt the strategies as shown below.

- 1) "Inactive" Projects: All projects where no work activity takes place within a two-week period or when work doesn't take place within 100 feet of the edge of pavement are to be considered "inactive" work zones. In "inactive" work zones, we need to cover or remove the stationary advance work zone signing. This work (i.e. sign covering/removal) will be considered "extra work" and the contractor is to be compensated for this work. Acceptable materials for covering signs are plywood, aluminum, and erosion control type fabric. The signs shall be fully covered and the coverings shall be maintained during work inactivity.

However, in work zones where we have lane width reductions, traffic shifts, or where construction is occurring within 100 feet of an open travel lane, all stationary advance work zone signing is to remain in place. In addition, if devices such as portable concrete barrier or temporary guardrail, drums, cones, etc. have been installed as a traffic control measure, then it is absolutely necessary to leave all stationary advance work zone signing in place. The idea is to have advance work zone signing in place with visible construction activity.

- 2) Projects, which are nearing completion awaiting "punch list" item repairs, are to be evaluated as well. All projects which are essentially completed ( i.e. final layer of surface been placed

with markings) but are awaiting minor repair work, should have all stationary advance work zone signing removed. Utilize portable work zone signing for all remaining work.

- 3) Guardrail/cable guiderail projects (mobile operations): The use of portable work zone signing is encouraged in lieu of stationary signs, especially when work activities are performed during daylight hours and away from traffic. The portable signing is to be removed when work activity isn't taking place.

On resurfacing projects, the use of portable advance work zone signing is also encouraged. These signs are to proceed with the paving operation once the lanes are brought up to the same elevation. Where stationary work zone signing is used, make sure work is taking place where the public can easily see the activities or the results of work activity. If no activity takes place within 2 weeks, then cover or remove the stationary work zone signs as mentioned in #1. If the shoulder work isn't completed, the use of "Low Shoulder" signing is a much better use of signs than "Begin Work Zone". The remaining shoulder work can be accomplished with portable signing.

- 4) Utility Work/Encroachment Agreements/Maintenance Operations: The Utility and Encroachment agreement work zones are by far the ones with the most "perception" issues. Many of these work zones are improperly signed as well as have portable signing left in place when no work or workers are present. These Contractors should be reminded to apply the work zone signing according to NC Roadway Standard Drawings and/or the ITRE Work zone Safety Guidelines for Construction, Maintenance, and Utility Operations (i.e. pocket flip chart) or the Part 6 of the MUTCD. These work operations should also be monitored closely to ensure the proper signing is in place during work operations and promptly removed when operations cease.

In addition, we need to continue our proactive efforts with signing in DOT Maintenance work zones. These work zones should have the same level of attention as the ones initiated by private Contractors. We don't want to give the perception that we aren't willing to provide the same level of safety and professionalism as private Contractors performing TIP work.

- 5) Future Changes: Beginning with the January 2001 Letting, all Traffic Control Projects will contain notes which will clarify the amount of time between installing the advance work zone signing and work being initiated on the project. This note will require the Contractor to begin work within three days of the placement of the signs. If no work takes place, then the signs have to be either covered or removed at no cost to the Department. In addition, as mentioned in #1, if no work takes place within a two-week time period after the Contractor has actively begun the construction, the stationary work zone signing must be covered or removed as well.

For work zones that are ordinances to reduce the speed limit during lane closures, the speed limit signing will be either a "flip-type" sign or a LED type sign. These signs are to be changed to the existing speed limit when the lane closures are no longer in place. All

attempts will be made as to not lower the speed limit when the work zone is "inactive". However, lane widths, roadway geometry, and other factors may involve a lengthier time for the speed reduction. All attempts will be made to "phase in" speed reductions at the appropriate time of construction, thereby minimizing the duration of the speed reduction.

However, I can not emphasize enough the importance of coordination and communication between the Division Construction Engineers and the DMV Enforcement Section. As a reminder, the Division Construction Engineers are the liaison between the Department and the DMV Enforcement Section on construction work zones. This is a far more effective solution to work zone "speeding" than lowering the existing limit.

The DMV Enforcement Section is dedicated to work zone safety and has the full support from its management. Understanding and utilizing this valuable resource will dramatically improve work zone safety for the construction workers, inspectors and the motoring public.

The stationary work zone signing is also being reevaluated. The Traffic Control Section is currently revising the sign spacing and distances from the project limits to accommodate the different types of roadways under construction. Interstate and Freeway signing will be signed differently from 2 lane roadways and so on. Basically, the advanced signing will be located closer to the construction limits and the "END WORK ZONE" signs will also be located closer to the construction limits. The exception to this will be "stationary" lane closures, commonly used in long-term cross-over operations. These signs will stay at their current locations.

Again, the idea behind this issue is to minimize the perception that the public has of "inactive" work zones. Let's strive to have any and all necessary signing for the public to safely navigate our construction zones and to remove the ones providing negative public perceptions and unnecessarily adding sign clutter and confusion. Thanks in advance for your support in this matter. If you have any questions, or need further clarification, please contact Stuart Bourne or Steve Kite at (910) 250-4151 in the Traffic Control Section.

JDG/sb

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