



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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GOVERNOR

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SECRETARY

February 28, 1991

MEMORANDUM TO: Division Traffic Engineers

FROM: James Mackay, P. E., Bicycle Facilities Engineer *James*

SUBJECT: Usage of SP-537 "Bicyclist Hazard" and SP-538 "Hazardous Tracks" plaques - Request for Assistance

I would like your assistance in evaluating the two bicycle safety plaques which the Traffic Engineering Branch has developed for use at skew or rough railroad track crossings. There is some question regarding the state's increased exposure to liability if we use these plaques at all. Another consideration is if these plaques are used selectively versus commonly at difficult (to bicyclists) railroad track crossings.

The new plaques are the SP-537 "Bicyclist Hazard" and the SP-538 "Hazardous Tracks" (see attachments). We have developed these plaques primarily for use at skew or rough railroad track crossings located along bicycle transportation corridors which we are improving in some way. Skew tracks present a particular operational hazard to safe bicycle transportation and are known to cause crashes. This hazard can be compounded by wet rails, loaded bicycle racks, and the bicyclist's lack of awareness.

The purpose of this memo is to establish a dialogue with you regarding the appropriateness of using these plaques - specifically to determine any concerns you may have. We recognize that coordination with the State Attorney General's office regarding liability concerns may become appropriate. However, to determine if the use of these plaques is something that we should pursue, we are asking for the input of operational personnel.

To assist you in your response, we would like to point out the following ancillary factors:

- 1) To date, we have used these plaques at four skew/rough railroad crossings.
- 2) The "Bicyclist Hazard" plaque is used underneath the W10-1 Railroad Warning sign. The "Hazardous Tracks" plaque is used underneath bicycle route signs immediately prior to the tracks.

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- 3) There is no national standard signage for this problem (and none "on the horizon".)
- 4) We are aware of successful liability claims arising from railroad crossing related crashes.
- 5) This issue correlates with the safety needs of other two-wheeled vehicle operators.
- 6) In order to cross skew tracks perpendicularly, it is oftentimes necessary for bicyclists to maneuver across the travelled lane and shoulder in order to make a successful approach. Motorists, who can cross the tracks without maneuvering, may not be aware that this is necessary for any bicyclists in front of them. How might we best convey to motorists that bicyclists will be needing to make a perpendicular crossing?

We are requesting that you provide us with any written thoughts or suggestions you may have pertaining to this matter. Your operational viewpoints will assist us in developing a policy for the usage of these plaques. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (919) 733-2804.

CBY/jm

Attachments

cc: Glenn Grigg, P. E., Signing Engineer, Traffic Engineering