

**North Carolina Department of Transportation  
Division of Highways  
Transportation Mobility and Safety Division**

**STANDARD PRACTICE  
for  
Painting on State Maintained Roadways**

**A. TOPIC OWNER**

Transportation Mobility and Safety Division

**B. PURPOSE**

From protest, to sports rivalries, sports team championships victories, horseplay and blatant vandalism, there is a plethora of reasons why someone may wish to paint the road, place messages, or place a symbol in the street. Regardless of the reason, it is NCDOT's policy to prohibit painting any text, symbol or artwork other than official traffic control devices as prescribed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. There are various reasons for this policy, and they all revolve around safety for all road users, safety of those maintaining the road, and those wishing to apply the text or symbol in the roadway.

**C. CONSIDERATIONS**

These safety concerns include but are not limited to:

1. The message or symbol could be a distraction to drivers, cyclist or pedestrians. One of the leading causes of crashes is inattention. Placing unnecessary messages and symbols detract from the primary task of those using the roadway.
2. The message or symbol could distort or change official traffic control devices that could confuse or mislead road users. The text messages, lines, and symbols placed in the roadway by NCDOT all have a purpose and a meaning. Marking over, or near these could cause drivers to misunderstand the meaning and purpose of the traffic control devices, and could lead to crashes and injuries.
3. The materials used to place the symbols and messages may create slippery roadway conditions due to rain, or condensation from dew. This is particularly dangerous for motorcyclists, bicyclists and pedestrians. This issue was discovered years ago with official traffic control devices, now these items have materials mixed into the material to provide texture to prevent slipping.
4. It requires closing the roadway for an extended period of time to apply the messages or symbols. This requires traffic control, and anytime a road is closed for any purpose, there are

higher risks of incidents. Discretionary closures such as placing unnecessary symbols and messages add risk without any benefit to the road user.

5. Even if all due care and design were taken, some messages will invite others to deface, or place counter messages. These counter-messages will likely not follow the same diligence used when placing the first message. A vandalized symbol or message will either need to be fixed, or removed, creating additional unnecessary road closures.

#### **D. GUIDELINES**

Actions to be taken if roadway is painted:

1. Depending on the message, symbol, and the placement, NCDOT will determine if the message needs to be removed or treated. For instance, if the message is a derogatory message or symbol, we would likely remove it as soon as reasonably possible.
2. If it is not a derogatory message or symbol, and it does not distort or cause confusion of a traffic control device, then we may just allow it to wear away.
3. If it creates confusion or safety concerns, then NCDOT will take the necessary action to return the roadway to a safe condition.
4. This does not include the markings used by Law Enforcement when conducting a criminal or motor vehicle crash investigation, or the department of transportation, utility companies or others marking the road for planned maintenance or construction activity.

#### **E. REQUIREMENTS**

1. The only exceptions have been granted are on low speed (35 mph or lower) roadways where there is a public agency willing to take responsibility for the area. These roads are not critical for regional or statewide transportation needs. Examples have been near a university where they had cultural events, or a municipality held a festival and wanted to place symbols and messages while the street was closed.
2. The responsible party will make sure that the messaging, artwork, symbols,
  - a. Are not derogatory;
  - b. They do not alter, or confuse any traffic control device at any time;
  - c. The material used is such that it is not permanent or retroreflective;
  - d. The material used will not create a slipping hazard for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists;
  - e. The material will fade under normal traffic and weather conditions in a few months or less;
  - f. And that if any concerns are brought forward by/to the department, the responsible agency will correct or remove the material at their costs.

3. The Division Engineer in consultation with State Traffic Engineer will approve the exception to paint a state-maintained roadway
4. There will be a requirement for local public agency to be responsible for ensuring the painting, materials, application, traffic control, etc. are being followed and to make sure any corrections or alterations are completed as required by the department.
5. Roads that serve significant traffic volumes (vehicles, ped, bikes), high speed facilities, or are critical links for regional or statewide transportation needs will not be considered.
6. The Chief Engineers Office, and NCDOT Communications will be notified Any exceptions approved.