

From: Sylvester, Kevin (FHWA)
Sent: Monday, June 05, 2017 10:07 PM
To: MUTCDFIELD <MUTCDFIELD@dot.gov>
Cc: MUTCDTEAM <MUTCDTEAM@dot.gov>
Subject: MUTCD - "Marine Highway" Signing

TO: MUTCD FIELD CONTACTS
SUBJECT: MUTCD – MARINE HIGHWAY IDENTIFICATION SIGNING

A number of States have been approached about erecting signs for the USDOT's [Marine Highway program](#), administered by MARAD. The Marine Highway system essentially promotes transport of goods via navigable waterways as an alternative to landside highways. Each Marine Highway waterway is designated with a route number that corresponds to the nearest Interstate highway that it roughly approximates as an alternative route between destinations. The route number is preceded by "M-" (e.g., M-95 runs along the East Coast as an alternative to I-95).

It has recently come to our attention that some of the State traffic engineers are being told that highway signs marking crossings of designated waterways have been "approved" by FHWA and/or USDOT, with the implication that the signs are acceptable, strongly encouraged, or required. This characterization tends to undermine the position of the State traffic engineer with the authority for specifying traffic control devices when the determination is that such a sign is not warranted.

We wish to clarify the fact that the FHWA Office of Operations has not approved or concurred on any sign design or use specific to the Marine Highway program. Our position has been that such a sign is promotional in nature and serves no navigational purpose to the road user. Therefore, signs for this purpose along the roadway would not be envisioned to be appropriate under typical circumstances. If a State were to determine, based on engineering considerations, that a sign marking the crossing of a designated Marine Highway were appropriate for installation, then the sign must comply with the provisions for General Information signs (MUTCD Ch. 2H) in terms of design and placement. General Information signs are required to have a white legend on a green background. Lettering must be in upper- and lower-case. Pictographs or other graphical elements would not be allowed.

Rather than erect a sign along the highway, it is recommended that promotion of this program be accomplished in more appropriate ways, such as information at rest areas and truck stops, outreach to freight haulers, etc.

BACKGROUND:

Initially, MARAD proposed a variation of the Interstate route shield to mark Marine Highway crossings with landside highways. AASHTO, which holds the trademark protection to the Interstate shield, concurred with FHWA in its concerns over such an adaptation of the Interstate shield. While a General Information sign might be considered for such a purpose, it remained questionable whether this type of sign would serve any purpose other than to promote the Marine Highway program.

The FHWA stated its position to MARAD in June 2015:

The broader issue is whether this type of signing, which is strictly promotional in nature, is warranted and serves the intended function of a traffic control device. The sign message does not serve to orient the road user with geographic or similar features typically found on an official highway map. The message would not be helpful in reporting incidents because the feature with which most road users and/or responders would be familiar would be the common name of the waterway. Finally, the message refers to a completely different transportation system that has no direct connectivity with the land system. Recognizing that one of the goals of your program is to promote the Marine Highway system, the most direct way to accomplish this along the (land) highway system is with information at safety rest areas or other roadside facilities, in addition to direct targeting of major freight haulers through other means.

Based on these considerations, it would not be appropriate for us to actively endorse the use of highway signing for this purpose. Ultimately, the decision whether or not to install such signing is up to the jurisdictional agency that operates the highway based on engineering considerations. If a sign is installed, then it must comply with the MUTCD in terms of design, placement, and other factors.

CONCLUSION:

Our position on signs that are purely promotional in nature and serve no traffic control purpose has not changed. Please direct any questions on this matter to Marty Calawa, Technical Lead for Guide Signs.

Kevin J. Sylvester, P.E., PTOE
Team Leader, Traffic Control Devices

Federal Highway Administration

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE ▪ E86-118 ▪ Washington, DC 20590

Tel.: (202) 366-2161 ▪ E-mail: Kevin.Sylvester@dot.gov ▪ Web: <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/>

