



THE INTRICATE INTERSTATE

Michael J. Tantillo
Associate Executive Editor

The year 2024 has been quite a whirlwind of activity in the traffic control device community! Everyone is excited about the new 11th Edition of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)* and is ready to put it into practice. The most common question I've received from practitioners is, "When can I start using the new MUTCD?"

The correct answer, for now anyway is, "it depends." Public agencies are in the midst of a transitional two-year period wherein some jurisdictions have already adopted and are using the 11th Edition while others are still using the 2009 *MUTCD* and associated state MUTCDs and Supplements for the time being. If in doubt, ask someone at the agency to confirm which set of traffic control device standards are in effect for a given project.

A significant amount of effort goes into a state's adoption of an *MUTCD*. First, the Final Rule content must be evaluated to determine the impact to a State DOT's operations in the context of the following considerations:

- State laws
- Fiscal and budgeting aspects
- DOT internal policies and practices

These impacts will closely drive how a State DOT achieves the required substantial conformance with the Federal *MUTCD*. Internal agency practices can be updated with leadership buy-in and some training. More complicated, however, is the process of budgeting and updated state laws, a time-consuming process. That is part of the reason why FHWA allows a full two years for transitioning to and adopting a new *MUTCD*. Best practice is to start as early as possible and develop a plan of action for each item or document that needs to be updated.

For states with a state Supplement or state *MUTCD*, new and conforming content can be drafted based on state transition plans. New for the 11th Edition of the *MUTCD* is a requirement that other state documents, such as standard drawings, specifications, and other agency policies, be in substantial conformance with the *MUTCD*, as they are considered supplements to the *MUTCD* by FHWA. Once all of those documents have been produced or modified, there are various approvals that take place, including substantial conformance reviews by FHWA Division offices and formal adoption by officials. In some states, a state-level rulemaking process may also exist.

Sometimes non-critical items require a level of additional research and analysis before they are ready to be published in a state Supplement or state *MUTCD*. Often these are optional practices from the *MUTCD* governed by, "If used..." Standard statements where the decision to utilize or not use is left up to a state DOT, and the state desires more concrete guidance. Other times, they are new devices that a state wishes to use but were not adopted into the *MUTCD* by FHWA. These circumstances may result in small research projects conducted by a state in cooperation with FHWA through the Request for Experimentation process. If the evaluation involves a new traffic control device not currently in the *MUTCD*, the FHWA *MUTCD* Team is willing and prepared to collaborate on research development and successful completion of an evaluation so that functional experimental devices can be provisionally approved for limited use and possibly included in future revisions of the *MUTCD*. Even if not related to a new device and an official experiment, any research or best practices on a traffic control device that may be beneficial to other practitioners can be readily and easily shared within our community: Simply submit a short (or long) research summary or other research paper to the *JTCDR*!

The above is what typically happens at the state level during the adoption period and why a two-year transition period is necessary. Our NCUTCD membership remains a crucial and competent resource for information sharing during *MUTCD* adoption. We all look forward to January 2026 when the transition period is over and everyone is using the 11th Edition of the *MUTCD*.