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Project Construction and Contract Administration Safety and Operations Work Zone Traffic Control Reviews

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Implementing an effective temporary traffic control plan is a vital component of project construction



Are drivers experiencing frustration, crashes and congestion with your road construction or maintenance project? If so, your temporary traffic control plan might not be operating to minimize these impacts to the travelling public. To ensure safe and orderly movement of traffic through the construction zone, local public agencies, or LPAs, need to implement an effective traffic control plan.

The safety of those working in or travelling through a work zone depends on proper setup and operation of the traffic control.



All work zones require a traffic control plan. The *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, also known as the MUTCD, contains the minimum requirements for traffic control in work zones. Work zones that do not meet these requirements might experience more crashes and traffic delays.

The temporary traffic control plan is developed during project design and submitted with your plans, specifications and estimate package for inclusion in the contract. Sometimes your

contractor will suggest changes based on different construction phases, and you will have to approve a final plan.

As the LPA, your responsibility is to inspect the project to ensure the traffic control plan is functioning as intended.

LPAs use the Work Zone Traffic Control Review to confirm the setup and effectiveness of the project's temporary traffic control. You do this by conducting periodic reviews throughout the life of the project and making appropriate adjustments.

Let's answer a few basic questions about planning to conduct the review.

1. The first question is: Who will conduct the review?

The FHWA suggests using a diverse project team with a wide range of expertise for valuable insights to conduct the review. The primary traffic control review project team should include the project manager, a traffic control supervisor and the contractor. You can include additional members who have unique perspectives, such as representatives from other construction sections, traffic, safety, maintenance and design.

2. The next question is: When will the review be scheduled?

Consider these factors as you determine when to schedule your review.

Plan an initial traffic control review soon after the project begins, night inspections if traffic control devices are left overnight, and in-progress reviews throughout the project, especially when construction phases change.

Determine whether the review will be announced or a surprise. Unannounced reviews might be more representative of the quality of the traffic control and allow you to better assess the effectiveness of the temporary traffic control for your project.

If night work is being performed, conduct the review after dark to assess the effectiveness of the traffic control plan under night-time conditions.

Also take into account the impact inclement weather might have on the effectiveness of the traffic control plan. Severe weather can lessen the benefit of traffic control devices, require longer stopping distances, impede visibility, and make work zone access points more dangerous.

3. The final question is: What documents should you gather for the review?

Prior to the work zone visit, get a copy of the current temporary traffic control plan for the team to review. Also, check to see if your State department of transportation, or State DOT, has developed a checklist that conforms to regulations and guidance documents to make it easier for you to conduct the work zone review.



So now you are ready to conduct the Work Zone Traffic Control Review. The review's purpose is to assess the overall effectiveness of traffic movement as it approaches and moves through your project's construction zone.

Let's use an example to clarify what actually happens during the review.

Suppose you have a project that is just beginning on a major local roadway. You decide to conduct an unannounced inspection to see if the traffic control plan is working. Since your agency does not have its own work zone inspection form, you download examples from your State DOT's Web site and from a national work zone safety site, and review them.



You also decide that a team approach to conduct the review will be more effective. You form a diverse and experienced review team that includes members from the traffic and safety section, a maintenance supervisor, another project manager, and the State DOT. Prior to arrival at the construction site, the team assembles at the project office to get a copy of the traffic control plan and to check flagger certifications. You instruct the team to document observations about problems team members experience while driving through the work zone, as well as the reactions of other drivers.

You select an inspection report form including specific areas of the plan to review, such as:

- Proper signage and its placement
- Channelizing devices are the right size and dimensions and are placed correctly
- Work zone barriers with impact attenuation devices
- Appropriately attired flaggers with proper equipment using recommended flagging methods

As the team approaches the work zone, they check to make sure the advance warning signs match those in the traffic control plan, are properly spaced, and are in serviceable condition.

The team observes that the "right lane closed ahead" sign is in poor condition and needs to be replaced, documenting the problem on the form. As the vehicle approaches the lane closure, they

check the spacing of the cones and the length of the taper. A flagger is observed slowing down traffic, so the team checks that the flagger is wearing high visibility safety attire and is using the appropriate stop-slow paddle that's visible. As the vehicle exits the work zone, the team observes that traffic is flowing smoothly.

The team returns to the work zone and reviews findings with the project engineer and the contractor. Prior to concluding the meeting, the team identifies the person responsible to correct deficiencies and when they must be corrected. A follow-up inspection is scheduled to ensure the corrections are made. Finally, you, as the review leader, send a copy of the inspection report to appropriate personnel and also file a copy with the project records.



As the project owner, LPAs are responsible to review and adjust the work zone traffic control, which helps to ensure the safe and efficient

movement of the traveling public and the safety of workers. Please check with your State DOT for further guidance on conducting the work zone traffic control review.

Web Resources

- Regulations, policies, best practices and updates related to work zone safety and mobility
<http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/wz/>
- Resources on crash data, expert contacts and training
<http://www.workzonesafety.org/>
- Additional resources related to work zones, including training
<http://www.atssa.com/>
- Link to the MUTCD, including Part 6 on temporary traffic control device requirements
<http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/>
- FHWA regulation requiring MUTCD as national standard
<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=7bb75a978907be70297ca611437838ab&rgn=div5&view=text&node=23:1.0.1.7.30&idno=23>
- FHWA regulation covering temporary traffic control devices
<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr;sid=ac50c6fdef0382eaaf0e2aef84f2fc;rgn=div6;view=text;node=23%3A1.0.1.7.21.10;idno=23;cc=ecfr>
- FHWA regulations for work zone safety and mobility
<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=290fc6120445390597f08cbae47b02d8&rgn=div6&view=text&node=23:1.0.1.7.21.9&idno=23>

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This companion resource is the script content for the video production of the same name.