A. Purpose

This policy sets the uniform, Wisconsin state standards for signs, which communities may install by permit on conventional State Trunk Highways under DOT jurisdiction to provide directional guidance to public facilities and traffic generators within the community.

The 2009 MUTCD, Section 2D.50 provides guidelines and standards for Community Wayfinding signing. Substantial conformance of these signs to the MUTCD and DOT policy is required by state law. Poorly designed and/or cluttered guide signs will not meet these requirements and could adversely impact safety.

On local streets and connecting highways, local agencies have the authority to install destination signs for local attractions and generators. If there is deviation from state and national standards to the extent that highway signing would adversely affect driving behavior, local agencies may face liability problems.

Therefore this policy establishes the following to be applied to Community Wayfinding Signing on State Highways under DOT jurisdiction:

1. the qualifying criteria for Community Wayfinding Signing;
2. guidance on qualifying destinations or facilities;
3. clarification of sign design and installation standards, applicable to WisDOT
4. the application and permit process for roadways under WisDOT jurisdiction.

B. Definitions

Community Wayfinding Signs

These are the signs, allowed by permit, which are owned and maintained by the community and direct to

1. municipal area destinations such as Downtown, or Historic District,
2. individual destinations that are publicly leased or owned and operated for public use, such as City Hall, Convention Center, and local parks, or
3. privately owned non-profit facilities open to the public, such as a local museum or ice center.

**Trailblazing Signs**

In this context, these are community destination signs that direct subsequent turns on local streets to reach the destination.

Trailblazing (directional route signing) to state routes is the responsibility of WisDOT and will not be permitted on Community Wayfinding Signs.

**C. Policy for Installation on State Trunk Highways**

The Department will allow the local agency, by permit, to install and maintain community wayfinding signs on the right-of-way of the conventional state trunk highway system, subject to the destinations, design, location, and maintenance of the signs being reviewed and found satisfactory by the Department. These signs **shall not** be permitted on freeways or expressways.

WisDOT **may** fund the installation of wayfinding signs as part of a Community Sensitive Solutions project. For all Community Sensitive Solutions projects that include wayfinding signs, the sign design and locations **shall** be reviewed for conformity to WisDOT and MUTCD policies by the Region Traffic Operations. Wayfinding signs that are funded and installed as part of a Community Sensitive Solutions project **shall** be maintained by the community.

This policy does not apply to banners, which are addressed in TGM 13-12-1 or civic displays, which are addressed in TGM 13-12-5.

**1. QUALIFYING CRITERIA FOR COMMUNITY WAYFINDING SIGNING PROGRAMS**

Community wayfinding signs will not be permitted outside a readily apparent urban developed area, usually characterized by a reduced speed limit, nearby transition to curb and gutter, and dense residential and/or business development adjacent to the highway.

Geographical areas or districts within a community **may** be permitted Community Wayfinding Signing. Two or more adjacent communities in an urbanized area **may** coordinate a common signing program, but the department will issue separate permits to each individual municipality.

No countywide programs will be permitted.

The community must develop a Master Plan for Community Wayfinding Signing, which contains the following information:

1. A map of the community, including the city street/local road system, which clearly identifies:
• Exact locations of destinations and attractions to be included in this signing program.
• State trunk highway approaches to city street/local road intersections where signing is proposed.
• Which destination(s) and attraction(s) are to be signed on each state trunk highway approach at each city street/local road intersection.
• City street/local road intersections where trailblazing signing is required to direct motorists to each facility.

2. A concept design of a typical community wayfinding sign, which may include the city logo, a street name and up to a total of three destinations/attractions. A maximum of three destinations should be displayed on a sign.

The Master Plan shall be submitted to the WisDOT Regional Traffic Engineer for review. This submittal shall be initiated and coordinated by the community and shall identify one contact or lead person in the community, through which all Department correspondence and contact will be made.

If a community obtains DOT approval for Community Wayfinding Signing, no new requests for traffic generator signing, which would qualify for Community Destination Signs, will be approved within the community.

2. QUALIFYING DESTINATIONS OR FACILITIES

Destinations or attractions must be of general interest to the traveling public and shall not be a retail, business or manufacturing center. The individual destinations shall be publicly leased or owned and operated facilities for public use or privately owned non-profit facilities open to the public.

Destinations which qualify for either Supplemental Traffic Generator signing or Community Wayfinding Signing.
• should be included on the Community Wayfinding Signs,
• may be on permitted supplemental signing,
• but shall not be on both at the same intersection approach.

A specific destination shall only be displayed on one sign structure in each direction on a highway unless straight ahead signing is also approved by the Regional Traffic Engineer.

This type of signing shall not display advertising for a commercial product or service.

IH, USH or STH directional signage shall not be allowed on Community Wayfinding signs.

3. SIGN DESIGN STANDARDS

Shape

The shape of the signs shall be rectangular and may have rounded corners. A rounded or other regular geometric shape on the top will be allowed to accommodate a logo.
Pictograph

Only one community pictograph may be incorporated in the top of the sign subject to WISDOT approval. If used, it shall be simple and easily recognizable. The height of the pictograph shall not exceed two times the height of the upper-case letters of the principal legend on the sign. For coordinated programs, a unique pictograph for each municipality may be used.

If a community name is to be displayed at the top of the sign panel, instead of or in addition to a pictograph, the lettering shall be of a size, font style and high color contrast for motorists to read at the posted speed.

All signs in a Community Wayfinding Signing program shall have the same format. If a community pictograph, and/or name, and/or street name, is to be used on any sign, it shall be used on all signs in the community program.

Pictographs for destinations and attractions shall not be permitted, since the traveling public will not recognize pictographs of local destinations.

Facing

Sign panel legends and backgrounds shall be reflective to meet the minimum standards of High Intensity sheeting.
Fluorescent reflective sheeting of any color shall not be permitted on these signs.
The sign shall not contain any animated or moving parts, flashing or moving lights, or flashing disks.

Color

Colors shall meet the standards for highway colors specified by the Federal Highway Administration. Color combinations shall have high contrast. Two-color combinations which may be used are:

a. White or yellow on blue, green or brown.
b. Blue, green, black or brown on white.
c. Red or orange on white, but not the reverse.
d. A third color, if used, must provide suitable contrast (i.e., not red on blue).

The background colors of orange, red, yellow, purple, or the fluorescent versions thereof, fluorescent yellow-green and fluorescent pink shall not be permitted on Community Destination Signs. One background color is preferred. A third color for the logo area may be used, or that area may be reversed in color. Color plaques or accents shall not be used under arrows or destination names. Lettering, arrows, and border shall be the same color.
Border

Border is optional. If used, it shall be plain, retroreflective, not decorative, and the same color as the letters.

Lettering & Sign Size

A minimum Series B font as specified in the Standard Highway Signs manual is preferred. A similar font is allowable, unless the style detracts noticeably from legibility.

The preferred letter size is 6" Upper Case/4 1/2" Lower Case. In areas, where the posted speed is less than 35 mph, a minimum 5" Upper Case/3 3/4" Lower Case or 5" Capital Letters will be allowed.

The resulting sign width shall not exceed five feet adjacent to a roadway posted at 35 MPH or above. The sign width shall not exceed four feet adjacent to a roadway posted at 30 MPH or below.

Arrows

Arrows shall be as big in dimension as the lettering, and the same color as the adjacent lettering. The arrows shall not have encircling accents, or contrasting mini-backgrounds.

Arrows shall be left of the message for left destinations, and right of the message for right destinations.

Ahead arrows shall not be used except in combination with left and/or right arrow(s) and destination(s) to pull through to one major area destination, such as DOWNTOWN, or direct ahead to one or more qualifying destinations where the through route turns. When used, ahead arrows shall be on the left side of the top line.

Destinations

Destinations/attractions on a community destination sign shall be displayed (from top to bottom of sign) in the following sequence:
- ahead destination (if used);
- left-oriented destinations/attractions (closest to furthest);
- right-oriented destinations/attractions (closest to furthest).

Community Wayfinding Signs should be limited to three destinations per sign.

4. SIGN INSTALLATION STANDARDS

Signs shall be installed by the community on separate supports furnished and typically used by the community. They shall not be combined with other signing by the community or the Department.

If signing is approved on the state trunk highway directing to a facility, any necessary

Date: August 2012
trailblazing signing shall be installed on the city streets/local roads by the community before signing is installed on the state trunk highway.

The community shall affix an identification code number label to the back of each sign in accordance with State Statute Section 86.19(5) and Traffic Guidelines Manual Subject 2-1-30.

Sign supports shall meet the National Cooperative Highway Research Program 350 breakaway standards. (NCHRP 350)

Sign installation and placement shall be in accordance with WisDOT Standard Sign Details A4-3, A4-4, and A4-8, A4-9, A4-11, or A5-9, as applicable.

Signs shall be placed in advance of the intersection where a turn would be required. Only one sign shall be permitted in each direction approaching an intersection and it should be located on the right side of the roadway.

The preferred sign spacing is 200 feet from any other highway sign. The minimum spacing shall be 100 feet.

Signs erected on the state trunk highway system shall have their locations approved by the Regional Traffic Engineer. Signs at all locations should be installed with due care to be visible, and to not obscure other traffic control devices. Further guidance on location is contained in Section 2A.16 of the 2009 MUTCD.

5. APPLICATION AND PERMIT

Sign destinations, designs, and locations on State highways under DOT jurisdiction shall be approved by the WisDOT Regional Traffic Engineer. Installation of these signs shall be through this permit process.

Upon receipt of a master plan for Community Wayfinding Signage, including the typical standard sign design and the identification of the community contact person, the Regional Traffic Engineer will review the plan for

- appropriate qualifying destinations,
- direct and effective routing to the destinations, including trailblazing on local roadways,
- appropriate sign locations,
- individual sign designs, and
- roadside conditions and constraints.

In order to expedite the process, the community should prepare the master plan in compliance with the guidelines in this policy. Any necessary denials or revisions may cause a return of the plan to the community contact person, resulting in a delay of the permit.

The permit will consist of an approved master plan attached to a permit letter signed by the Regional Traffic Engineer, and may include the necessary standard sign installation
details mentioned above.

All sign panel designs should be reviewed and approved by the Regional Traffic Engineer before fabrication.

The community shall be responsible for the construction, installation and maintenance of the community wayfinding sign structures and sign panels at its own expense.

If community wayfinding signs are not properly maintained, the community shall, upon request by WisDOT, replace or remove the signs at its own expense. If not replaced or removed within 30 days of notification, WisDOT will remove the community wayfinding signs at the expense of the community.

Roadway reconstruction and/or installation of new regulatory, warning or guide signs may necessitate relocation or removal of community wayfinding signs by the community at its own expense.

D. Grandfather Clause

Existing permitted Community Wayfinding Signs will be allowed to remain temporarily without modification or replacement until the end of their useful life, or December 31, 2015, whichever comes first. Unpermitted signs shall be removed as soon as possible, unless they meet the standards contained in this policy. In that case, the community may apply for a retroactive permit by submitting the required master plan.
WisDOT backs off grant deadline

By: Dan Shaw    July 2, 2014 3:40 pm

A tweaked interpretation of the phrase "commence construction" will prevent dozens of planned trail and sidewalk projects throughout the state from losing grant money.

A provision tucked away in the state’s budget set various deadlines for the start of projects awarded money through the Transportation Alternatives Program, which helps pay for sidewalks and bicycle and pedestrian trails. For plans that are more than four years old, Wednesday was the final day; for newer projects, the deadline is four years from a grant’s award date.

About a month ago, Wisconsin Department of Transportation officials said that for work to be considered “commenced” in time, a local government had to advertise the project’s letting date by the deadline. Relying on that interpretation, they put out a news release May 30 warning that 56 projects were at risk of losing grant money this year.

Many local officials protested, saying they were caught off guard by the notice. To help ease at least some of the concerns, WisDOT now offers a slightly different interpretation.

According to a June 18 letter attributed to WisDOT Secretary Mark Gottlieb, local governments have done enough if they have completed environmental studies and acquired real estate needed for a project. The letter was sent to Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. Melanie Conklin, a spokeswoman for Parisi, said her boss was more than happy to hear the news.

A long-planned trail running between Madison and Stoughton in Dane County was among the 56 projects WisDOT listed as being at risk of losing grant money. The proposed Lower Yahara River Trail received a $4.17 million grant in October 2010, according to WisDOT records.

Dane County officials have completed much of the preliminary work on the project, spending $340,000 in local money on designs and buying up 90 percent of the land needed to connect the trail to Stoughton. But they still were uncertain if they could get a bid date advertised by the October deadline, Conklin said.

WisDOT’s reinterpretation now has given her and her colleagues peace of mind, she said.

“This comes from the county and the DOT meeting and working on the definition of the term ‘commencement,’” Conklin said.

Peg Schmitt, a WisDOT spokeswoman, said it’s too early to say how many of the 56 projects are now likely to keep their grant money, but she estimated it could be “well over half.” She said state officials continue to work with local officials to find ways to make sure the deadlines are met.

“It involves working with the communities to understand what the specifics are on each individual project,” Schmitt said. “The individual circumstances are different.”

For West Allis officials, help came with WisDOT’s decision that the start of work on the first phase of a trail project would prevent the loss of grant money set aside for the second phase.

The city was in danger of losing a $589,700 grant awarded in 2004, even though construction had begun on approximately the first mile of a $3 million trail project meant to connect Milwaukee’s lakefront with Waukesha. Peter Daniels, principal engineer for West Allis, said WisDOT at first had insisted the grant be tied to the project’s second phase, which was delayed for years after state officials required the route be changed to avoid a busy railroad.
Anxious about the prospect of losing the grant money, Daniels met with WisDOT representatives in the state Capitol on June 13. In the end, WisDOT officials decided the completion of the trail’s first phase meant the project got underway by its Wednesday deadline.

Daniels said he is grateful to know West Allis has secured the money for its trail project and that he is willing to make little fuss about the likely loss of another grant — $49,800 awarded in 2008 to establish safer routes to schools.

Other city officials are taking a similar attitude.

Phil Fieber, Eau Claire public works director, said state officials hurried to approve plans for a proposed reconstruction of a downtown railroad bridge after recognizing that a delay could push the project past the state’s deadline. A $494,000 grant the city had received in September 2008 was at stake if the bid date for the project was not advertised by Wednesday.

With the state’s help, Fieber said, he was able to get the ads out last week. As long as money is secured for the railroad bridge reconstruction — a long-standing priority for Fieber and his colleagues — he said he can accept the loss of grant money for other projects.

Eau Claire received a $286,172 grant in 2008 to build safer routes to schools and a $171,200 grant in 2009 for a trail along the Chippewa River. Fieber said city officials probably will reapply for that money.

But for those working on projects that already have reached an advanced stage, such as the Lower Yahara River Trail, having to reapply would have been like taking a step backward, Conklin said. WisDOT’s reinterpretation means Dane County officials need not reconsider their plans, she said.

“It seems as if we are now moving forward,” Conklin said, “and everything is back on track.”

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