What are the Options for Organizing the MUTCD?

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At the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) annual meeting in June 2012, representatives of FHWA indicated that they had received input that the MUTCD had approached the size that it was becoming more cumbersome to use. One of the options that they mentioned they were considering is dividing the content of the MUTCD into multiple documents. Dividing the MUTCD into multiple documents or volumes is also mentioned as an option in several of the white papers developed for this strategic planning effort.

This white paper identifies various approaches for how the content in the 2009 MUTCD could be divided into multiple documents or volumes. This paper is not attempting to determine whether the MUTCD should be divided up, but is merely suggesting options for doing so if such a decision is made.

- **Option #1: Heading Based Division** – In this approach, the MUTCD is divided into two documents based on the heading of the content.
  - Volume 1, which would likely be the “official” MUTCD, would be all the standard statements in the current MUTCD.
  - Volume 2, which could have a name other than MUTCD, would consist of all the guidance, option, and support statements in the current MUTCD.

- **Option #2: Functional Division** – In this approach, the MUTCD content is divided into multiple volumes based on the function or purpose that the language serves.
  - Volume 1 could cover the meaning and appearance of traffic control devices as suggested in White Paper #1. It might consist of selected standards from Parts 2, 3, and 4 of the MUTCD. It might also include guidance, option, and support statements.
  - Volume 2 could cover the application of TCDs including the selection, installation, maintenance, and removal of devices. The content in Volume 2 might include standards, guidance, option, and support statements. Typical applications and illustrates for device placement might be found in this volume or in Volume 3.
  - Volume 3, if provided, could be a document of best practices related to TCDs. This might be a document that contains information such as how to do speed studies, how to fabricate signs, develop signal timing, and maintain various aspects of TCDs.
  - Volume 4, supporting information – Traffic design issues that relate to traffic control

- **Option #3: Statute Division** – In this approach, the content of the MUTCD is divided based on its relationship to legal statutes.
  - Volume 1 would be those TCDs that are specifically mentioned in federal statute and in the Uniform Vehicle Code (UVC).
  - Volume 2 would be content that is not specifically mentioned in federal statutes or the UVC.

- **Option #4: User Division** – In this approach, the MUTCD content is divided into multiple volumes based on the intended user of the content.
  - Volume 1 could establish standards for basic definitions, meaning, and appearance.
Volume 2 could be targeted to users making engineering decisions regarding selection and application. Some parts of this volume might also deal with engineering issues related to operation, maintenance, removal, or other aspects of TCDs.

Volume 3 could address content intended for field users such as sign crews and contractor personnel. This content would typically address installation issues.

Volume 4 could address content intended for other users of the MUTCD.

A related approach would be to divide the MUTCD according to the content and its intended application or the specific audiences that design/install/maintain TCDs, such as: railroads, toll operators, airports, National Park Service, public transit operators, shopping centers, military installations, bicyclists, pedestrians, and temporary traffic control contractors...to name a few. We should recognize that a bike sign engineer doesn't need to know or care about what a toll operator needs to know or vice versa.

Other options may also exist and will be added to this white paper as they are identified.

A key aspect associated with the potential of dividing the MUTCD content into multiple documents or volumes is whether the entire set of documents/volumes is defined as the “official MUTCD” or only one of them is so defined. White Paper #1 discusses the purpose of the MUTCD and suggests that one possibility would be to define the “national standard” for TCDs as addressing meaning and appearance. If this course of action is pursued and the MUTCD were divided into multiple documents, only one of those documents would be identified as the “official MUTCD.” The other documents would be MUTCD companion documents, but they might present TCD principles using exactly the same format as used in the current MUTCD (standards, guidance, option, and support statements).

Associate with the issue of dividing the MUTCD is the question of who would be responsible or splitting the content and maintaining the additional documents. For the content in any of the supporting documents (those that are not the “official MUTCD” and which would not go through the rulemaking process to be changed) to be aligned with that in the “official MUTCD,” the supporting documents would have to be developed and maintained in a manner that is very similar to that used for the current MUTCD. It is proposed that the NCUTCD be responsible for developing the content and that the FHWA retain ownership of the documents and be responsible for publication/distribution. This arrangement is proposed because the NCUTCD is comprised of representatives of a large number of sponsoring organizations that are directly involved in TCD activities. It is the only such organization that can claim an actual consensus-based approach that representatives the broadest spectrum of practicing professionals. It is also the only professional organization whose sole focus is on the MUTCD and related activities. The FHWA is proposed as the owner of the supplemental documents because the dividing of MUTCD content can be successful only if all of the information is freely available to practitioners in the same manner that the current MUTCD is. FHWA would accept the documents from the NCUTCD and publish them on the MUTCD website along with the “official MUTCD.”