What is the Target Group of Road Users that the MUTCD Content is Intended to Accommodate, if any?

White Paper #6, version #01, prepared August 20, 2012

Author: Gene Hawkins

White paper #2 addresses the target user audience for who the MUTCD is written for. A similar issue can be applied to the users that traffic control devices (TCDs) are intended to serve. The issue of who TCDs are intended to serve is important as it addresses the extent to which agencies should try to accommodate the needs of a wide variety of road users. It would be simple to say that TCDs should accommodate all users on roadways. However, this is not a practical expectation. There are some road users that agencies may not be able to accommodate. Examples include:

- Road users who are not operating a vehicle in a legal manner. This includes:
  - Drivers who are intoxicated or otherwise legally impaired,
  - Drivers who do not have a drivers license,
  - Drivers who are not operating their vehicle in accordance with the law or that are not complying with TCDs, and/or
- Road users who are not properly trained to operate a vehicle. This includes:
  - Drivers who may have a license in another country but who are not familiar with driving practices in the U.S.,

The 2009 MUTCD recognizes these limitations and includes the following statement:

"The proper use of traffic control devices should provide the reasonable and prudent road user with the information necessary to efficiently and lawfully use the streets, highways, pedestrian facilities, and bikeways."¹

The capabilities of a driver cannot be understated. Driving is a learned process. The driver must possess a minimum level of knowledge and skill in order to safely operate a vehicle. The drivers licensing process provides a means of confirming the competence level of a driver. The Uniform Vehicle Code (UVC) states that an applicant be tested for the following capabilities in order to obtain a drivers license:

- Visual acuity,
- Ability to read and understand official traffic control devices used in the state,
- Knowledge of safe driving practices,
- Knowledge of the traffic laws, and
- Ability to exercise ordinary and reasonable control in the operation of a vehicle.

In possessing these capabilities, a driver should have a basic knowledge of the types of potential situations which may be present in the roadway environment and the type of responses that are appropriate for a given situation. However, the driver is not required to anticipate extraordinary

¹ 2009 MUTCD, Section 1A.02, paragraph 06.
dangers, impediments, or obstructions to which his or her attention has not been directed, or of which he or she has not been warned.

Although transportation agencies are responsible for a roadway, they cannot be “an insurer of the road or a guarantor of absolute safety.”\(^2\) Courts have recognized that “it is impossible to design and construct a highway that is always free from [hazards].”\(^3\) The responsibility of an agency is to maintain roadways “in a way that is reasonably safe for travel.”\(^2\) The driver is required to use reasonable care for his or her own safety. It is only an alert, attentive, and unimpaired driver that can use the roadway in a safe and efficient manner.

Given the information described above, for the purposes of the MUTCD strategic planning effort, the target group of road users that the MUTCD is intended to address is described below.

Traffic control devices are intended to provide a reasonable and prudent road user, who is functioning in an alert, attentive, and unimpaired manner, with the information necessary to function in a safe and efficient manner that is consistent with applicable traffic and vehicle laws and regulations. An alert, attentive, and unimpaired road user is defined as a person who possesses the basic knowledge and capabilities necessary for traveling on the facility, is not traveling with an impairment which limits the operation of the vehicle or the individual, and uses ordinary care appropriate to the circumstances present at any given moment.
