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MEMORANDUM

Re: FHWA Issuance of Interim Approval

Introduction

Since the termination of Interim Approval 11 on December 21, 2017, professionals have been coming to terms with the loss of a very effective warning beacon. The termination of IA-11 was not due to safety or performance of the device, but due to an issue where the FHWA prohibits the use of a traffic control device which is patented. This was a known issue for years; however, it became clear that the issue would not resolve. Many agencies created alternate designs using older guidance for Active Warning Beacons. Fortunately, the FHWA has released a new Interim Approval 21 for RRFBs dated March 20, 2018. IA-21 comes on the heels of the RRFB patent being purchased by another manufacturer which then disclaimed the patent. Read more about this here: <https://carmanah.com/RRFB-reinstated>

This memo attempts to provide guidance to Alta clients and partners about the current status of RRFBs and any differences in guidance between IA-11 and 21.

Immediate use of RRFBs

IA-21 is an entirely different FHWA approval and agencies who had previous permission under IA-11 to use the RRFB will need to request permission again from FHWA in accordance with the provisions of Section 1A.10 of the MUTCD.

Notable Differences between IA-11 and IA-21

1. FHWA now defines the RRFB as a “pedestrian-actuated conspicuity enhancement” rather than a “warning beacon.”
2. FHWA has expanded allowable warning sign to include the W11-15 “Trail” warning sign showing a bicycle and pedestrian. This is in addition to the pedestrian only and school warning signs (W11-2 and S1-1). Many agencies have been using the W11-15 with RRFBs for some time.

3. FHWA has expanded the use of RRFBs to include supplementing overhead warning signs similar to the provisions for traditional warning beacons as defined in Chapter 4L. This will be interesting to observe as agencies implement as this will allow for beacons suspended over the travel lanes.
4. FHWA clarified placement of the RRFB unit as directly beneath the supplemental warning sign rather than within 12 inches; however, a big change here is the addition of providing an option to place the RRFB up to 12" above the warning sign.
5. FHWA provides more prescriptive guidance as to the flashing requirements of the unit. This guidance also recommends reprogramming existing RRFBs that are currently operating in an alternate pattern.
6. Operation clarification that the flash pattern should activate immediately upon detection, this detection may extend the period of flashing if new pedestrians are detected. The RRFB may also begin operation immediately after the unit has ceased flashing. Note: Alta's experience in high pedestrian volume locations shows that RRFBs can be active for a large percentage of the time. If an agency prioritizes a reduction in vehicular delay, a pedestrian hybrid beacon may be desirable to allow groups of pedestrians to congregate and cross together, thus reducing overall delay. Hybrid beacons may be installed on posts similar to RRFBs in some cases.
7. FHWA adds guidance on accessible pedestrian features including locator tones, audible information and speech push buttons.