



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 98

Resolution calling upon the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to amend the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) to allow for large American cities such as New York City to implement more restrictive traffic guidelines than those prescribed in the MUTCD, in order to better preserve resident safety.

By Council Members Fidler, Comrie and Rodriguez

Whereas, The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) publishes the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which contains all national design, application, and placement standards for traffic control devices; and

Whereas, The purpose of these devices, which include signs, signals, and pavement markings, is to promote highway safety and uniformity so that traffic can move safely and efficiently on streets and highways throughout the nation; and

Whereas, The MUTCD is adopted in accordance with Title 23 of the United States code, Section 109(d) and Title 23 of the code of federal regulations, part 655.603, and is also approved as the national standard for designing, applying, and planning traffic control devices; and

Whereas, While the FHWA adopts the standards, the individual state and local highway agencies nationwide select, install, operate, and maintain traffic control devices on all roadways (including the interstate and the U.S. numbered systems), complying with the MUTCD standards for all traffic control devices without exception; and

Whereas, While the standards of the MUTCD are flexible and change in response to travel patterns and road conditions and incorporate technology and advancements in materials, the manual itself is completely rewritten only once every ten to twenty years and has historically only relied on periodic updates, occurring

every two to three years; and

Whereas, The process for changing or updating a MUTCD standard requires submitting a written request to the FHWA of the Office of Transportation Operations (HOTO), which is a lengthy and arguably inefficient process for affecting change for traffic conditions that may require more immediate solutions in the interest of public safety; and

Whereas, Traffic control devices can help ensure that fewer pedestrians and drivers will be killed or injured by regulating the flow of traffic in a busy neighborhood and alert drivers and pedestrians as to who has the right of way; and

Whereas, A traffic control device is currently prohibited from being placed at a given location if it does not meet the criteria set by the MUTCD despite a community's potential desire for such a device at that location; and

Whereas, Sometimes, where MUTCD does not allow a traffic control device to be placed, one should be placed there anyway based on objective history of frequent traffic accidents; and

Whereas, The City's Department of Transportation (DOT) accepts letters of request and provides an online form from people who believe the conditions at an intersection meet the requirements set in the MUTCD for a traffic control device, but such expressions of need do not guarantee that a request will be granted; and

Whereas, DOT refers the request to its Traffic Engineering Unit for the respective borough, which in turn makes a preliminary study of the street corner in question, including traffic and pedestrian volumes, vehicular speeds, accident history and sign spacing; and

Whereas, The Traffic Engineering Unit conducts a field investigation to observe traffic on the street corner at various times and on different days of the week, over approximately six weeks, to determine whether conditions at the intersection meet the federal standards for traffic lights and signals set out in the MUTCD; and

Whereas, After an analysis, the department may approve the request, in which case DOT will schedule an installation to occur within three or four months; and

Whereas, In deciding between a stop sign and a traffic light, DOT considers the number of vehicles that go through an intersection, how fast they are traveling, and the visibility and presence of other traffic lights nearby; and

Whereas, New York City is unique in the size and density of its population and in its proportion of pedestrians to motorists compared to other cities in the United States, which raises questions about whether the criteria set forth in the MUTCD properly address traffic conditions particular to New York City; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to amend the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) to allow for large American cities such as New York City to implement more restrictive traffic guidelines than those prescribed in the MUTCD, in order to better preserve resident safety.

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