

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20510

January 18, 2023

The Honorable Shailen Bhatt  
Federal Highway Administrator  
Southeast Federal Center Building  
1200 New Jersey Ave. S.E.  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Bhatt:

We are concerned about the recent decision by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to discourage the ability of states to use humorous traffic-safety messages on our roadways.

We understand the recently released 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways<sup>1</sup> from the Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration included Section 2L.07 on these safety message campaigns. This section notes that a Changeable Message Sign (CMS) should not have “messages with obscure or secondary meanings, such as those with popular culture references, unconventional sign legend syntax, or that are intended to be humorous...” as these references “might be misunderstood or understood only by a limited segment of road users and require greater time to process and understand.”

While safety is our highest priority for our constituents traveling on our roadways, we have concerns about this guidance. We agree that clear, concise signage is important; however, we believe this can be done with humor while keeping the attention of drivers on the road.

For the last seven years, the Arizona Department of Transportation has held a contest to find the funniest and most creative messages for the freeway signs. Last year’s winners were “Seatbelts always pass a vibe check” and “I’m just a sign asking drivers to use turn signals.”<sup>2</sup> New Jersey used signs to keep drivers’ attention during the holidays, like “Don’t be a grinch, let them merge.” Or Santa’s watching, put down the phone.”<sup>3</sup> Both of these states have signs that use slang or popular language, but the messages are clear: wear seatbelts, stay focused on the road, and use turn signals. And in a survey completed by the FHWA, more than 80% of respondents said they understood the messages on highway signs.<sup>4</sup>

Further, this is a blanket discouragement of humorous signs that leaves no room for state-by-state discretion. As members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, we understand that

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<sup>1</sup> [https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/11th\\_Edition/mutcd11thedition.pdf](https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/11th_Edition/mutcd11thedition.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.azfamily.com/2024/01/13/federal-government-gives-adot-2-years-remove-humorous-freeway-signs/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/transportation/2023/11/29/nj-department-of-transportation-holiday-signs-reckless-driving/71726497007/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/fhwahop14015/ch5.htm#table26>

part of the role of State Departments of Transportation includes tailoring messaging for their residents. They oversee the state and know what works for their drivers. The expertise and oversight of the FHWA is important for highway safety, but our State DOTs create state-specific communications that ensure our local residents know what is happening and stay safe.

We request the answers to the following questions before February 1<sup>st</sup>:

1. Please explain the analysis that went into FHWA's decision to issue this guidance in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways;
2. Please specify if there was crash data or fatality data that went into these decisions, and how those statistics were tied to sign messaging; and
3. Please detail any communications between FHWA and State DOTs when making this decision.

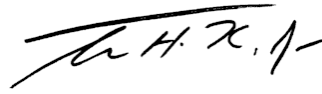
We look forward to your prompt response, and your continued partnership to keep our highways safe.

Sincerely,



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Greg Stanton  
Member of Congress



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Thomas H. Kean, Jr  
Member of Congress