

Safety Corner – Sign Size Can Make a Difference

On municipal streets, speeds are generally lower and so too the severity of most crashes. On the other hand, these streets tend to be multi-modal, with lots of pedestrians and bicyclists. Even if crashes are rare, road users and adjacent residents can feel anxious about the safety of the roadway and it is our job to use all the tools at our disposal to minimize risk, real or imagined. In doing so, we reduce the likelihood of crashes and make residents and visitors more comfortable driving, walking, and cycling our streets.



There is an entire toolkit of low-cost safety measures available to us and we will explore one of them here. Making a sign more conspicuous can boost its effectiveness, and it doesn't take much. The Delaware Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices ([MUTCD](#), Part 2A.15) offers twelve suggestions and we'll revisit some of the others in the future. But, top of the list is an increase in the size of a regulatory, warning, or guide signs.

For example, let's say you're receiving reports of close calls at the intersection of two subdivision streets where the Stop signs are 30"x30". Particularly if it is time to replace that sign (perhaps its retroreflectivity is waning; a topic for another day), consider replacing them with 36"x36" Stop signs. You will find that the increased cost is small but those larger signs will pop.

It is also common to see Speed Limit signs that are 18"x24", and indeed, the Delaware MUTCD allows for this, "on low-speed roadways, alleys, and private roads open to public travel where the reduced legend size would be adequate for the regulation or warning or where physical conditions preclude the use of larger sizes" (Part 2A.11). When it is time to swap that sign out, experiment with a 24"x30" Speed Limit sign and you may find it garners greater attention. It certainly will be harder for the offender to say to the officer, "I didn't see it." And let's help that officer out a bit more by making sure vegetation doesn't creep in and hide the sign.



W11-2 *

One more example. You may have a pedestrian crosswalk that gets a lot of use and there are some tire marks on approach or you are getting complaints that motorists aren't yielding. Consider replacing that 24"x24" or 30"x30" W11-2 with the next size up to see if conditions improve.

All that said, indiscriminant use of over-sized signs is probably a poor idea. The sign itself will cost a little more and if it's not value-added, that's a poor use of funds. In some instances, there can be interference with pedestrian or bicycle traffic as well, so use the concept judiciously.

You can read more about low-cost safety countermeasures in Low-Cost Safety Enhancements for Stop-Controlled and Signalized Intersections ([FHWA-SA-09-020](#)). There are dozens of ideas related to stop-controlled intersections, signalized intersections, lighting, high friction surfaces, and speed control for approaches.

The Delaware T²/LTAP Center's Municipal Engineering Circuit Rider is intended to provide technical assistance and training to local agencies and so if you have roadway safety concerns or other transportation issues, contact Matt Carter at matheu@udel.edu or (302) 831-7236.