

Date of Hearing: April 1, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
Jim Frazier, Chair
AB 634 (Salas) – As Introduced February 15, 2019

SUBJECT: Traffic control devices: roundabouts: memorial and dedication signs

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to include roundabouts within the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) list of facility types eligible for memorial or dedication signage.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Assigns to Caltrans the responsibility of operating and maintaining state highways, including the installation and maintenance of highway signs.
- 2) Requires Caltrans to, after consulting with local agencies and holding public hearings, adopt rules and regulations prescribing uniform standards and specifications for all official traffic control devices in the MUTCD.
- 3) Enables the Legislature to, through a concurrent resolution, request that Caltrans erect signs showing special designation upon receiving donations from non-state sources covering the cost, consistent with the signing requirements for the state highway system.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: A roundabout is an intersection where traffic travels around a central island in a counterclockwise direction. Vehicles entering or exiting the roundabout must yield to vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Roundabouts can have many advantages over traffic signals when constructed in the right location, including:

- 1) They provide traffic calming, resulting in reduced speeds.
- 2) They require less maintenance, have lower yearly operational costs, and have a longer service life.
- 3) They reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing vehicle idling time.
- 4) The median islands provide refuge for pedestrians, allowing them to cross one direction of traffic at a time.
- 5) They provide additional opportunities for landscaping in the community.

Research shows that roundabouts can be an effective way to improve safety at intersections. A review of 55 roundabout installations shows a reduction of 35% in crashes. More importantly, the number of severe injuries related to crashes was significantly reduced up to 80%.

A well-designed roundabout requires motorists to slow when navigating the roadway. Because of this, roundabouts can serve as a method to alert roadway users that they are transitioning from one roadway environment to another, such as from the freeway to the local street system, or from a rural environment to one which is more urban. This is why Caltrans typically reserves the space within a roundabout for landmark and gateway monuments such as community names.

For all these advantages, Caltrans has been pursuing the installation of roundabouts when appropriate. While there are less than 50 roundabouts on the state highway system currently, Caltrans indicates that many more are planned in the future.

The MUTCD is a federal document issued as the national standard for uniform standards and specifications for all official traffic control devices in accordance with federal law. The California MUTCD incorporates the Federal Highway Administration's Manual and includes all additional policies on traffic control devices approved in California. This bill requires Caltrans to update the California MUTCD to compel Caltrans to allow memorial or dedication signs on roundabouts.

According to the author, "AB 634 will require that roundabouts be added as a type of highway facility that may be used for memorial or dedication signing. Other highway facilities that can be named include highways and freeways, bridges, interchanges, rest areas, and vista points. A roundabout can also help define a community by displaying art or designs on the central island that represents local heritage."

Committee concerns: There are a number of issues with this proposal. First, Caltrans updates the MUTCD every year through a public process in which anyone can propose changes to the state's uniform signage policies. In fact, the Office of Administrative Law has deemed the update of the MUTCD a regulatory process and therefore requires Caltrans to take specific steps in updating the manual each year. Engineers and other experts serve on the California Traffic Control Devices Committee and weigh the benefits as well as the safety and cost challenges of each proposal before making changes to the MUTCD. Additionally, the federal government has to approve any proposed changes before they can be adopted. It seems reasonable that, if anyone wants to change the MUTCD, he or she would propose that change to the experts on the committee and allow those who are able to best determine the safest alternatives to make the ultimate decision.

Second, roundabouts are relatively unique in California and there are many different configurations. Many drivers are unfamiliar with a roundabout, and therefore Caltrans installs a number of signs to clearly direct users (vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists) to the safe use of the facility. Signage that isn't necessary for the direction of proper ingress and egress of a roundabout could lead to confusion, and detract from safely traversing the roundabout. Because of this potential distraction, it is unclear whether memorial or dedication signage is warranted in these type of facilities.

Finally, there are 15,092 center lane miles of state highway in California and 13,391 state-owned bridges and other structures. If every highway naming was a structure or 5 miles of highway, that creates the opportunity for more than 16,400 memorial or dedication signs throughout the state. The committee may wish to consider whether it is necessary for the Legislature to create more opportunities for memorial or dedication signage through statute.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file.

Opposition

None on file.

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