

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #8

WHY ISN'T THERE A "SCHOOL BUS STOP AHEAD" SIGN EVERYWHERE A BUS STOPS?

Signs improve the safety of a roadway by warning of hazards and assisting with the orderly and predictable movement of traffic. Before a sign can be placed along a roadway, it must meet four requirements:

1. The sign should fulfill a need. This need should be identified by a field study or other information, such as crash history data.
2. The sign should draw attention. The purpose of a sign is defeated if roadway users do not notice it.
3. The sign should have a clear message that all roadway users can understand.
4. The sign should be placed properly so that roadway users have enough time to perceive and respond to its message.

The specific location, number, and characteristics of signs placed within a roadway's right-of-way must meet the requirements of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD). In addition, the placement of a sign within a roadway's right-of-way must be authorized by the jurisdiction that owns and/or maintains the roadway.

PLACEMENT OF "SCHOOL BUS STOP AHEAD" SIGNS

According to the MUTCD, a "School Bus Stop Ahead" sign (see Figure 1) should be installed in advance of locations where a school bus, when stopping to pick up or discharge passengers, is not visible to road users for an adequate distance and where there is no opportunity to relocate the school bus stop to provide adequate sight distance.



FIGURE 1 "School Bus Stop Ahead" sign (MUTCD S3-1).

Reference: Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices

Typically, a specific school bus stop location is investigated as a candidate for a "School Bus Stop Ahead" sign if a request is filed with the government entity that has signing authority along that particular roadway. If the sight distance before the school bus stop is inadequate, an alternate bus stop location should first be considered as the safest option. If the terrain or roadway features do not allow an alternative bus stop location, a "School Bus Stop Ahead" sign should be installed.

OVERUSE AND MISUSE OF “SCHOOL BUS STOP AHEAD” SIGNS

The placement of unnecessary “School Bus Stop Ahead” signs reduces the overall effectiveness of these signs. The purpose of these signs is to warn drivers of unexpected hazards, such as a bus stopped in the roadway and/or passengers crossing the road. If these signs were placed at every school bus stop location, even locations where the bus and its passengers are visible from an adequate distance, drivers would begin to believe that caution is only needed if a bus is visible near a “School Bus Stop Ahead” sign. In reality, however, a bus may be over a hill or around a curve. Moreover, if drivers begin to see these signs at numerous locations, especially where they are not needed, they may begin to experience signing fatigue and ignore the signs completely.

The overuse and misuse of “School Bus Stop Ahead” signs can thus render the signs ineffective, even those signs placed where they are really needed, that is, where drivers cannot see a stopped school bus. These signs must be used consistently and prudently to ensure their effectiveness.