

Uniformity in Traffic Control

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A great deal is said and done in the world today concerning uniformity and in view of the fact that it is my plan here today to discuss uniform traffic controls, I would like at the outset to attempt to evaluate the matter of uniformity itself.

To seek uniformity merely for uniformity's sake in my view is unwise and in fact not completely in keeping with the basic way of life to which we are accustomed and in which we believe. But uniformity in certain areas where a complete and proper evaluation of the problem has been made is another thing altogether.

The much discussed "AMERICAN DREAM" is itself a dream of individuality; of singleness of purpose and to a large sense at its outset in the 1700's of non-conformity.

This, we would not want to change; this is basic to our way of life and it is in fact the driving force of individuality that has made this country great—the driving force of human individual personalities working together toward a common goal.

It is just such a group of enlightened and inspired Americans that has properly evaluated the need for uniform traffic laws and devised the new uniform traffic code.

It is such groups as this one, here today, working together, and as individuals which will travel a road that is better lighted because of the research on traffic laws. It is a road that leads to more orderly and safe traffic travel.

We are followers and supporters of the great Americans of the past and present of all political parties and beliefs who have helped form this world in which we live. They made their contributions through the driving force of their personalities and intellects, working together for the common good.

And so it is natural that we, as individual Americans, should perhaps first of all want to have clearly established the need for uniformity in a specific area before we support the solutions to that need.

Let us look then at a few factors which indicate the need for uniform traffic controls.

Of most immediate concern to those of us in public safety work is the traffic safety value of uniform traffic signs and signals and, of course, the accompanying additional comfort for motorists.

In today's heavy, often fast moving, traffic-streams drivers have no time to study out the meaning of signs and other control devices. The driver must get the intended message in a flash.

Many drivers cross a number of city, state and county lines on frequently made trips. They have every right and need to expect uniform traffic devices.

Modern traffic control standards can do a great deal to increase the traffic capacity and to provide better use of the capacity of existing streets and roadways. It is a well known fact, for instance, that pavement markings such as lane lines, turn markings and stop lines substantially increase the capacity of a street by inducing the orderly movement of traffic on that street, by giving clear lane use

directions and by allocating the available roadway in accordance with the needs of traffic. Hap-hazard and non-standard pavement markings are less efficient and more confusing than uniform markings.

So far as the individual motorist is concerned; efficient highway transportation means to him personally that he can get from here to there comfortably, conveniently, safely, and at a satisfactory speed. If he finds the signs where he expects them, can read and understand them readily and they give him plenty of advance notice so that he can do what they say, he gets along well. If he has to keep trying to find signs that should be there and aren't, or if they are small, dirty or too close to the point of driving decision; he naturally becomes confused, irritated, and tired.

It is important too to remember that home-town motorists may get used to non-standard controls, but strangers will be confused and by doing the wrong thing may cause an accident.

What is the financial case for uniform traffic controls? Well, modernization of any type usually requires some outlay of money, but it also usually pays dividends. Ask any merchant why he spends money for modernization! The money a community spends for modernization of its traffic control will come back with interest in improved efficiency and reduced accidents.

It is significant to note that due to the work of the United States Bureau of Public Roads and Kentucky Department of Highways; all federal and state roads in the commonwealth now have traffic signals, signs, and markings in conformance with the uniform traffic code. It is also significant to note that there are many city and country streets and roads in Kentucky that do not.

Perhaps you have already studied the new manual on uniform traffic control devices for streets and highways.

In my view, one of the most important provisions of the manual is that it substitutes single standards for many of the alternatives in traffic control devices previously permitted. A good example is the stripe to mark 'NO PASSING' zones. The new standard calls for the use of a yellow line to the right of the white center stripe to designate road sections where passing is not permitted. Up to the present some of the states have used yellow lines and others have used white, a practice which has tended to confuse motorists unfamiliar with local conditions. Kentucky, as you know, has for some time used the method outlined in the new manual.

At best, when motorists are confused as to the meaning of traffic control devices they make improper driving maneuvers that delay traffic, or that cause them to lose their way and so forth. At worst, their faulty driving maneuvers stemming from misunderstood traffic controls, can result in an accident and death.

Uniformity of signs, signals and markings aid drivers also by providing instant recognition and understanding. It also aids police and courts in traffic law enforcement by eliminating questions about interpretations of control measures. Uniformity also makes possible economies in the manufacture and maintenance of traffic control devices. All of these things contribute to the safety and efficiency of highway transportation.

In working for the needs of traffic safety; I am often concerned over the fact that each regulation, each new law, usually in some measure curtails one or more of our individual freedoms. I think too that many times it is our tendency in this modern world to always look upon legislation as a panacea, a crystal ball and magic wand answer to our troubles.

Here then is an area that does not curtail our individual liberties, nor does it demand legislative enactment. Rather it calls on individuals working together to attain adoption of the uniform code in their cities and counties.

It is obvious that there are many problems that can be solved only through legislation. But the pattern is clear in the matter of uniform traffic signs and signals.

The road to uniformity in this matter will not always be an easy one to travel. There will probably always be the well-intentioned pressure of citizens who often demand action contrary to the standards of uniformity. Good examples are the unwarranted use of traffic signals, many of which create more accidents than they prevent and actually delay rather than expedite traffic, and the use of unreasonably low speed zones which encourage flagrant violations and thereby disrespect of all traffic laws and enforcement officers.

It is true that blind adherence to handbook standards is as objectionable as rash unreasoned departure from them. It is interesting to note that the new manual discourages both. It stresses the principles on which the standards are based and encourages the imaginative application of the standards.

Allowance is made for research and experimentation leading to improvement of standards. On the other hand, 'TINKERING' is discouraged, as it properly should be.

The success of uniformity in practice depends on the exercise of engineering judgment and imaginative application of standards.

In having served at the federal, state and local levels of government, it has been dramatically brought home to me through the years that traffic control is one of those unique matters which is a responsibility of all political jurisdictions—state, federal, county and municipal. A major part of the overall task is to secure effective action in cities and counties where the greatest number of traffic control devices are and will be found.

As a former city commissioner, mayor, and city manager, I am constantly aware of the fact that commitments by county and municipal executives to get this job done are of "top importance."

As commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Public Safety and a citizen of Kentucky, I am extremely concerned over the six per-cent rise in traffic deaths in Kentucky and throughout the nation last year. I am convinced that uniformity of traffic control is one of the ways we can save some of the lives that are lost on our highways, prevent some of the injuries and curb a part of the economic loss.

I pledge to you the dedication and cooperation of The Kentucky Department of Public Safety to fight this battle. Thank you very much.