

## Getting Signs Right!

By Richard James, P. Eng, PTOE

Traffic signs are the primary means of communicating to drivers' critical information that is not apparent from the roadscape. It is essential that the message conveyed by signs be unambiguous and consistent. To this end we have Sign Standards that are derived in part from legislation (regulatory signs), and partly based on sound engineering and accepted "Best Practices".

Since we have a multiplicity of jurisdictions in BC we need to take special care to ensure consistency, which means all road authorities must follow the BC Motor Vehicle Act Regulations that are explained more fully in the BC Ministry of Transportation Sign Manual that clearly indicates....

### *1.5 Standardization of Application*

*Similar situations must always be signed in the same manner in order to ensure correct driver response. Therefore, to maintain signing integrity, standards for the application of traffic signs must be upheld. Signs should be used only where they are warranted. Excessive use of signs detracts from their effectiveness.*

As an example of a common problem in BC let us look at two regulatory signs. These have been chosen as an example of one of many instances where the Regulations are not being followed. As these are regulatory signs it is most important that drivers receive the correct message that is consistent and unambiguous. If this does not happen, drivers get used to doing "the wrong thing", then one day someone will ignore them and become involved in a collision, and liability will conceivably end up with the Road Authority because the signage was legally wrong. Just a badly thought, where they are used correctly, they will be ignored because drivers have become used to the wrong application of the signs.

Again quoting the BC Manual...

**R-16L**



(60X60)

*TURN CONTROL signs may be used at intersections or accesses to mandate (green signs, at left) or prohibit (red signs) the movement(s) of **all traffic on an approach** as specified on the sign.*

*TURN CONTROL signs should not be confused with LANE USE signs which are used to regulate the use of specific lanes and are mounted in advance of the intersection.*

**R-18**



(60X60)

*LANE USE signs (black signs at right) are used to indicate to the motorist the use of a specific lane on an approach to an intersection.*

*LANE USE signs regulate the lane assignment on approach to intersections and should be used where the movement is contrary to driver expectation or to the normal rules of the road.*

*LANE USE signs should not be confused with TURN CONTROL signs. Turn control signs are used to control all traffic in all lanes at an intersection.*

**R-81**



(75X75)

**R-82L**

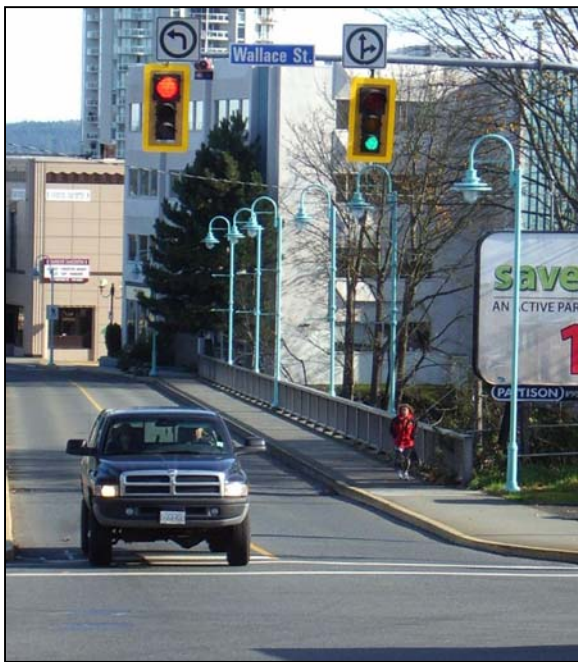


(75X75)

It should be clear from this that only one of the green (permissive) Turn Control signs or a combination of red, (prohibition) signs can be used on any one intersection approach as that sign applies to all traffic. If two permissive signs (for example left turn only permitted and through only permitted (both green)) are used, there is a conflict that essentially says no one can move and comply with the signage! The correct signage in this case is to use the Lane Use signs (black) over each lane.

In the first two of the following photographs these signs are being used incorrectly. In the top photo, the red turn prohibition sign (left foreground) is correct, however the green sign (at the end of the right lane) is incorrect, it should

be the black Lane Use sign, mounted prior to the end of the lane (side mounted or overhead, where the text sign is). The use of turn control signs to indicate lane usage at this signal (bottom left photo) literally means an approaching driver can legally (regulatory sign) not move through the intersection as the signs conflict, one says you can only go straight ahead or turn right, the other one says you can only turn left... Again, the signage should be the black lane control signs, preferably mounted prior to the signal mast arm. The bottom right photo shows the correct sign application, black lane control signs mounted over each lane prior to the intersection. If necessary for further clarity, arrow signal heads should be used.



Signs, of whatever type, must always be designed and placed so that they are clearly visible and legible, are placed so that they can be read, understood and acted upon safely to enable the driver to make and execute the correct maneuvers in a timely and safe manner under the prevailing traffic and roadway conditions. This means that sign and lettering sizes must be adjusted for vehicle speeds, and positioning must recognize the probability of signs being obscured by traffic in adjacent lanes on multi-lane facilities.