

City of Richmond Traffic Engineering Section - Frequently Asked Questions

When should multi-way stop signs be installed?

Multi-way stop signs should ordinarily be used only where the volume of traffic on the intersecting roads is approximately equal. Furthermore, the installation of multi-way stops must also meet the conditions set forth in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, (MUTCD)* These conditions generally include:

- A certain number of vehicles on the major street and on the minor street for the same eight hours of an average day or;
- An interim measure for locations where traffic signals are needed or;
- An accident problem with five or more “angle” type crashes in a twelve month period.

Sometimes citizens request multi-way stops to address perceived speeding and safety issues in residential areas. However, traffic studies conducted nationwide have revealed a low level of compliance at intersections with multiway stop signs that are installed under the wrong conditions and not in accordance with the MUTCD. This lack of compliance often leads to a reduction in safety and an increase in vehicular speeds, quite contrary to the intention of citizens who request additional stop signs as a way to address these concerns.

Other issues may also arise from the installation of unwarranted stop signs. Motorists may take alternate routes to avoid the stop signs, thus creating new problems in adjacent areas. Also, unwarranted signs heighten motorist frustration and disrespect for other traffic control devices in general.

When used at the correct location and under the right conditions found in the MUTCD a stop sign provides an effective and valuable traffic control device. Stop signs improve safety at intersections by assigning right-of-way, but also must demand compliance from motorists in order to ensure effective and safe traffic control at an intersection.

** The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) published by the U.S. Department of Transportation is the national standard for the installation of all traffic control devices such as multi-way stop signs. This Manual must be used for all roads open to public travel. This is done to insure consistency in guidance and warning throughout the highway system, which promotes the orderly, safe, and predictable flow of traffic on all roads. The multi-way stop warrants are found in Section 2B.07.*

<http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/htm/2009/part2/part2b.htm>