



Photos from the Road

Stop Means Stop

By Steven Schrock, P.E.

Here is an interesting traffic sign captured by our KUTC staff. This was taken outside of Kansas, but otherwise we won't say where.

Lisa Harris, our LTAP Director, snapped this photo of a cute little stop sign-like supplement with the phrase "STOP MEANS STOP" underneath this STOP sign.

While this is eye-catching, it is not in the spirit or the letter of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) for several reasons. First, Section 2A.05 of the MUTCD states "Regulatory and warning signs should be used conservatively because these signs, if used to excess, tend to lose their effectiveness." (1)

So even if this was an actual regulatory sign, it would not meet the guidance in the MUTCD because of the redundancy of two STOP signs on one sign.

But it's worse than that. The "STOP MEANS STOP" sign is not a STOP sign. It does not have the proper wording or size to be a STOP sign. It also is not an advisory plaque. Advisory plaques are not red in color or octagonal in shape.

So if the "STOP MEANS STOP" sign is not a regulatory sign, and it is not an advisory plaque, what is it? Well really, it's just a distraction. I'm sure the agency that added it wanted to draw extra attention to this stop location which may have had a prior history of intersection crashes or of drivers failing to stop. By adding this, perhaps they thought they could gain additional attention for the stop condition and get better compliance. Perhaps this was even the result.

However, there is a reason the MUTCD discourages this practice. Even if the local agency had used the proper signage for this (which they didn't), what does this mean for the other stop-controlled intersections nearby? Does stop mean stop there, too?

The bottom line is that if there is a need to highlight a STOP sign due to a safety or compliance issue, it is better to include supplements that are already in the MUTCD, such as flags, flashing lights, or proper advisory plaques. Drivers have experience with these devices and will understand their meanings better than homemade alternatives. Regarding any legal liability, the placement of the regulation stop sign still has full legal authority and is not jeopardized by the extra sign.

Do you have an interesting traffic control situation you would like us to interpret? Send it to us at kutc_training@ku.edu. We might include it in a future edition of our Kansas *LTAP Newsletter*.

(1) Federal Highway Administration, Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, 2009. <https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/2009r1r2/part2a.pdf>, Accessed September 6, 2019.

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