

VDOT GUIDANCE REGARDING FHWA TERMINATION OF INTERIM APPROVAL OF RECTANGULAR RAPID FLASHING BEACONS

Background

On December 21, 2017, FHWA [officially terminated](#) its 2008 Interim Approval IA-11 of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs). The FHWA Notice was presented as effective immediately without the regard for the multiple impacts of the Interim Approval’s suspension.

FHWA undertook this action because of ongoing dispute regarding patents that were issued subsequent to FHWA’s 2008 issuance of IA-11. The MUTCD prohibits patented devices from experimentation, Interim Approval, or inclusion in the MUTCD. FHWA has offered a link to [Frequently Asked Questions](#) as guidance.

It is important to note that FHWA’s actions are not related to any safety issue with RRFBs. VDOT continues to believe that RRFBs, when appropriately placed and operated, offer important safety benefits. This guidance will be rescinded if the ongoing patent dispute is ever resolved such that FHWA is able to reinstate RRFB Interim Approval.

This Interim Guidance from VDOT will take effect December 21, 2017 and remain in effect until revised or sunset. A notification period to prepare and provide notice of this guidance to Industry and to Localities was determined to be necessary.

VDOT’s Interim Guidance on the Termination of RRFBs Approval




Existing RRFBs:	Existing RRFBs do not need to be removed and can remain. These devices can remain in service and can be maintained as necessary. These devices should be replaced with Options 1 & 2 , when necessary and practical.
Projects with completed design, under advertisement, or under construction:	The plans should not be revised to eliminate use of RRFBs due to added costs and potential delays, the RRFB may be installed . Any RRFBs already ordered or in stock may be installed.
Projects in design:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RRFBs shall not be used if the engineering work has not yet begun. ▪ Projects that have a finalized Engineering Study recommending the use of RRFB, can select from as described below without need for a new Engineering study. These options are considered a direct replacement to RRFBs in typical situations. ▪ If the design plans are currently in progress, then RRFBs can be used only if approved by Central Office Traffic Engineering. If the project involves federal funds, then CO-TED will also need to notify and coordinate with FHWA Division Office. ▪ If the design plans have reached substantial completion or have been submitted for final approval, then it is not necessary to redesign the plans to eliminate the use of RRFBs.
Future projects:	RRFBs shall not be used , until if or when FHWA is able to reinstate RRFB Interim Approval.
Land Use Permit development and locality projects on VDOT roads:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RRFBs shall not be used if the preliminary design plans have not yet been submitted to VDOT as of March 21, 2018. ▪ If any preliminary plans are submitted between Dec 21, 2017 and March 21, 2018 (the notification period to Industry), the permittee shall provide justification for not revising the plans to eliminate use of RRFBs. ▪ If the preliminary design plans have already been submitted as of December 21, 2017, then it is not necessary to redesign the plans to eliminate RRFBs.

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Alternatives to RRFBs:

The following traffic control devices are in conformance and can be implemented for a particular crossing if their use would be appropriate based on the specific conditions at the site ([IIM-TE-384](#)), such as roadway geometrics and traffic volumes and speeds, in accordance with the MUTCD.

For future projects where the designer would have previously identified a need for an RRFB based on the standards of [IIM-TE-384](#), Options 1 or 2 can be considered equivalent to RRFBs and can be accordingly installed. Where overhead RRFBs were a consideration under [IIM-TE-384](#), then consideration would be given to an overhead flasher design or potentially Option 3. Option 3 is a different type of treatment and is separately addressed in IIM-TE-384.

<p><u>Option 1</u></p>	<p>Pedestrian-activated Flashing LEDs in the Border of a Warning Sign:</p>		<p>See Section 2A.07 of the MUTCD</p>
<p><u>Option 2</u></p>	<p>Pedestrian-activated Warning Beacons:</p>		<p>See Section 4L.03 of the MUTCD</p>
<p><u>Option 3</u></p>	<p>Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons:</p>		<p>See Chapter 4F of the MUTCD</p>



Example of Post-Mounted Option 2

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Other Considerations:

Flashing lights or beacons in Pedestrian/Bike/School assemblies shall not continuously flash; they must be tied to passive or active pedestrian detection. It is recommended that the Districts develop projects to add passive or active pedestrian detection to existing Pedestrian/Bike/School warning lights that currently flash continuously.

Flashing beacons as described in Option 2 above may be post-mounted or overhead. Overhead installations “should be considered” for locations with speed limit **above 35 mph**.



The Cities listed below have previously received interim approval to use RRFBs. These devices **can remain in service** and **can be maintained** as necessary.

- City of Charlottesville
- City of Chesapeake
- City of Hampton
- City of Lynchburg
- City of Richmond

Additional References

- MUTCD [Frequently Asked Questions](#) Related to the Termination of IA-11 RRFB
- FHWA [Informational Brief](#) on effective treatments for Uncontrolled Marked Crosswalks that comply with the MUTCD.
- VDOT [IIM-TE-384](#), Pedestrian Crossing Accommodations at Unsignalized Locations

Please contact Harry Campbell at 804-786-6374 or Marc Lipschultz at 804-371-6022, in the VDOT Central Office Traffic Engineering Division with any further questions or concerns.