

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #18

How Are the Locations of Traffic Signs Decided?

People sometimes wonder why traffic signs are placed at certain locations and not at others. Once a sign is determined to be necessary, many factors go into the decision of where the sign will be located. Some of the principles that determine the most effective location for a sign are described below.

The type of sign determines where it will be placed

Traffic signs fall into three categories, and the signs in each category are placed according to a different set of criteria. The most effective location for a *regulatory sign* (such as a speed limit sign or stop sign) is determined by local officials based on the characteristics of the roadway and the type of information the sign conveys. A *warning sign* (such as a “Narrow Roadway” or “Railroad Crossing Ahead” sign) is posted far enough in advance of a hazard that drivers can see the sign and then respond before reaching the hazard. A *guide sign* (such as a milepost sign or a sign that directs motorists to area services) is placed where appropriate.

Drivers expect to see signs on the right side of the road

Most signs are located on the right side of the road, where drivers are used to seeing most signs and will be looking for them. Overhead signs may be necessary on expressways or roadways where sufficient space is not available or where additional signage is needed.

Sign spacing is based on how much time drivers need to read and react to signs

The spacing between signs is determined by the vehicle speeds at a given site and is chosen to give drivers adequate enough time to read and understand the signs and make appropriate driving decisions. Too much information presented to a driver too quickly can be confusing and may result in unsafe decisions and/or actions.

Sign placement follows certain general principles

Traffic signs are placed only in the public right-of-way of a roadway and should be located where drivers will expect to see them.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.