PCMS Usage Upon Roadway Re-Opening - Survey

Question raised by Mark Lazier, DE
Distributed 2/2/16

Issue/Question:
Does your agency have a policy or standard practice of using portable changeable message signs (PCMS) to alert road users that a road closure has ENDED, and therefore the detour is no longer needed and the road network has been returned to normal conditions?

Back Story:
Road A has a bridge that was closed for construction, detouring traffic to Road B (among other roadways). Road B intersects Road A at a normal T-intersection about 100F from the closure - two of the three approaches are Road A, Road B starts/ends at Road A; Road A is uncontrolled; Road B is STP-controlled. Right after the new bridge to the traffic, there was a fatal crash at the intersection where the vehicle hit a truck traveling over the newly reopened bridge on Road A. The contention of some is that drivers on Road B (and the victim in particular) were lulled by compliance because of the lack of traffic on Road A due to the closure and were ignoring the STP sign. The criticism is that we should have alerted users of Road B that Road A was open to traffic.

DelDOT standard practice is to put one or more PCMS in each direction of Road A one to two weeks prior to the closure with a "closure coming" message, and then once the closure is put in effect, the message changes to a "closure in effect, follow detour" type message. Rarely would we have then changed the message to a "roadway now open" message.

Summary:
- 35 responses
- No states have a formal policy on this topic

Responses:

State            | Response
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Al             | We do not have a policy or standard practice for such in Alabama, however some of our regions will use a PCMS to notify drivers of a new traffic control device (i.e. new signal, conversion to a two way stop, etc.) or new alignment/additional roadway lanes being opened for travel. However, I don’t think we would have used a PCMS on Roadway B given the description below.
Ar             | We do not have a policy or standard practice for such in Arkansas. The question is broad enough that I am not sure that we have ever done this.
Ca             | We do not have a policy or standard practice for such in California.
Co             | We do not have a policy or standard practice for such in Colorado.
De             | We do not have a policy or standard practice for such in Delaware.
Fl             | Florida DOT does not have a policy or standard practice to notify that a road closure has ended.
Ga             | Georgia does not have such a policy or practice.
Ht             | We have had several bridge replacement projects near T-intersections in my tenure, similar to your situation and, to my knowledge, have not had a similar practice. We did have one situation where the closure and the detour were at the intersection and the STP sign was removed to facilitate flows, but in general our approach has been to leave the existing STP sign in place on the sideroad and we generally do not use PCMS unless there are high traffic volumes or the traffic pattern is so different from the previous closure. When we do use PCMS, we do as you described, giving notice of closure, but not of reopening. I contend that a STP sign means "stop" and while there may be things we may sometimes do to enhance traffic flows, it is still the driver's responsibility to follow the regulatory signage in all cases.
Ia             | We are not aware of any instances where Illinois has used a PCMS to notify motorists of a detour/road closure removal.
In             | No, IDOT does not have a formal policy on PCMS use but this scenario is not expressly addressed.
Ir             | We have had several bridge replacement projects near T-intersections in my tenure, similar to your situation and, to my knowledge, have not had a similar practice. We did have one situation where the closure and the detour were at the intersection and the STP sign was removed to facilitate flows, but in general our approach has been to leave the existing STP sign in place on the sideroad and we generally do not use PCMS unless there are high traffic volumes or the traffic pattern is so different from the previous closure. When we do use PCMS, we do as you described, giving notice of closure, but not of reopening. I contend that a STP sign means "stop" and while there may be things we may sometimes do to enhance traffic flows, it is still the driver's responsibility to follow the regulatory signage in all cases.
Ks             | We are not aware of any instances where Kansas has used a PCMS to notify motorists of a detour/road closure removal.
Ky             | Kentucky would not use the PCMS to indicate the closure has ended. Generally we would display a message indicating a new traffic pattern and remove the detour signs.
Ml             | In Maryland we would not use the PCMS to indicate the closure has ended. Generally we would display a message indicating a new traffic pattern and remove the detour signs.
Ms             | MaineDOT does not have a policy on that specifically but we have on at least one project that I know of put road now open and that had to do with complaints from some local businesses that were on the closure.
Nd             | MDOT does not have any policy requiring a message on a PCMS that the roadway is open. We do have Portable Changeable Message Sign Guidelines (link below) that are currently in effect which provide for the use of PCMS to communicate messages to traveling public. The example below seems like a unique situation where a reopening message would have been helpful, but drivers should never become complacent with a stop sign.
Nj             | We do not have such a policy in New Jersey.
Nn             | There can always be a unique situation where an opening message is helpful and we would do it if we saw value. I feel like we did one in the past but cannot think of any specific examples. Similar to others, we have posted "New Traffic Pattern" messages on PCMS for appropriate conditions.
Oh             | We do not have such a policy in Ohio.
Ok             | One state (AR) noted that they did use PCMS in this fashion as a typical practice.
Pa             | We do not have any policy or standard practice of using portable changeable message signs (PCMS) to alert road users that a road closure has ENDED. We do not advise road users when a temporary detour is no longer in place other than to remove the temporary detour signage. If there is a traffic change, we may use a "NEW TRAFFIC PATTERN AHEAD" sign. For the case explained in your request, probably not since it was placing traffic back to its original pattern. One of the VDOT Regions shared that certainly the PCMS is needed to alert motorists to coming work, detours, and closures. In situations that cause changes in the network (such as signals, stop signs or new routing) posting static new traffic pattern ahead signs is important. Additional stop signs posted if deemed necessary. Appropriate public outreach should also help to ensure that motorists have advance knowledge of the changes. In some areas, VDOT residency staff have posted flyers near the location of the work, and sent it to residents. This approach seems to work well.
Sc             | South Dakota does not have a policy on the use of PCMS until we don’t know of any situation where a reopening message would be helpful, but drivers should never become complacent with a stop sign.
Tn             | We do not have a policy or standard practice for such in Tennessee.
Va             | Virginia does not have a policy or standard practice of using portable changeable message signs (PCMS) to alert road users that a road closure has ENDED. We do not advise road users when a temporary detour is no longer in place other than to remove the temporary detour signage.
Vt             | We do not have a policy or standard practice of using portable changeable message signs (PCMS) to alert road users that a road closure has ENDED. We do not advise road users when a temporary detour is no longer in place other than to remove the temporary detour signage.
Wv             | We do not have any policy or standard practice for such in West Virginia.
Wv             | We do not have any policy or standard practice of using portable changeable message signs (PCMS) to alert road users that a road closure has ENDED. We do not advise road users when a temporary detour is no longer in place other than to remove the temporary detour signage.
Wt             | We do not have any policy or standard practice of using portable changeable message signs (PCMS) to alert road users that a road closure has ENDED. We do not advise road users when a temporary detour is no longer in place other than to remove the temporary detour signage.
Wv             | We used PCMS to alert drivers that a roadway has been opened for the short period of time between the roadway re-opening and the static detour signs being removed/covered.
Wv             | We do not have any policy or standard practice of using portable changeable message signs (PCMS) to alert road users that a road closure has ENDED. We do not advise road users when a temporary detour is no longer in place other than to remove the temporary detour signage.
Wv             | We do not have any policy or standard practice of using portable changeable message signs (PCMS) to alert road users that a road closure has ENDED. We do not advise road users when a temporary detour is no longer in place other than to remove the temporary detour signage.