

PCMS Usage Upon Roadway Re-Opening - Survey

Question raised by Mark Luszczyk, DE

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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 1000' 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 STOP-controlled. Right after Road A re-opened to traffic, there was a fatal crash at the intersection where the victim ran the STOP sign on Road B and was hit by 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 into complacency by the lack of traffic on Road A due to the closure and were ignoring the STOP 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 PCMSs 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 messages to a "roadway now open" message.

Summary:

35 responses

No states have a formal policy on this topic

One state (AR) noted that they did use PCMS in this fashion as a typical practice

Four states mentioned that they have used PCMS in this fashion in rare or special circumstances

Responses:

State	Response
AK	No policy here to cover that circumstance.
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 all-way from 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	While Arkansas has no formal policy for this, we do typically place PCMS in locations where drivers have been travelling through a closed roadway work zone when the roadway is opened to live traffic, usually putting them out on public roads 30 days prior to the opening. We also utilize our public information division to get the word out through regular and social media sources that the new roadway is opening. The most challenging condition seems to be private drives. We have had crashes where a motorist would drive across the work zone going to/from their home to the existing roadway for a few years, and then get hit when live traffic was moved to the new location. In some cases, our construction offices have gone from door-to-door notifying the residents of the pending traffic change.
CT	Connecticut does not have such a policy or practice.
DE	We do not have a policy or standard practice for this situation. Recently we had a high traffic volume, high profile project that closed a major flyover for reconstruction work that involved a significant detour and we did post a message when the flyover re-opened. This is the only situation I can recall that we've
FL	Florida DOT does not have a policy or standard practice to notify that a road closure has ended.
IA	Iowa does not have such a policy or practice.
IL	I'm not aware of any instances where Illinois has used a PCMS to notify motorists of a detour/road closure removal
IN	No, INDOT does have a formal policy on PCMS use but this scenario is not expressly addressed.
KS	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 fatality. We did have one situation where the closure and the detour were at the intersection and the STOP sign was removed to facilitate flows, but in general our approach has been to leave the existing STOP sign in place on the sideroad and we generally do not use PCMS unless there are high traffic volumes or the detour is far removed from the actual closure. When we do use PCMS, we do as you described, giving notice of closure, but not of opening. I contend that a STOP 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.
KY	I am not aware of us ever doing this, and we certainly don't have a policy requiring it.
LA	Louisiana has no practice of this. We use the PCMS to alert of road closures but not that road work is completed.
MA	We do have an Engineering Directive on the use of PCMS at MassDOT, but it does not cover the use of PCMS for a roadway/bridge re-opening. I think that we may have done this in the past but can't think of any specific examples. Similar to others, we have posted "New Traffic Pattern" messages on PCMS for appropriate conditions.
MD	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.
ME	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.
MI	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) and the messages should be current with the work being done. Another thought in the situation below if traffic operations are being changed with stop controls perhaps use of temporary rumble strips could serve as more of an active warning. http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/MDOT_IM11-
MN	We often notify people of a new traffic pattern, but not typically when the detour is removed. I can't say for certain it has never been done, but I am not aware.
MS	Mississippi has no such policy or practice. (Even if we did, I'm not sure it would have addressed the scenario described below.)
MT	No such policy or practice in Montana.
NC	We often notify people of a new traffic pattern, but not typically when the detour is removed. We figure the removal of the detour signs sends this message.
NE	We do not have such a policy in Nebraska.
NH	Interesting question. I can tell you that I can't think of any situation where we would provide positive messaging that a closed road was now open and there are a couple projects that I can think of that are similar to the one you described. I've copied a few of our Construction Engineers for their opinions. For the most part NHDOT uses PCMS similar to the DelDOT (mostly prior to road closures). However in an informal way, when a PCMS is available, we have on occasion alerted traffic to changed traffic patterns, which may include the opening of a new roadway. But most of the time we will just do a "soft" opening of the new or re-opened facility. Just like in DelDOT, we do most of our public outreach leading up to the road closure than when the road reopens.
NJ	NJ's standards are similar to Delaware's. Construction and Traffic Operations staff seem to recall isolated instances of bridge re-openings in which some type of "bridge open" message was utilized; however, it is not NJ's policy or practice to announce the re-opening of a roadway closure.
NV	Not in Nevada.
NY	Generally, our practice is similar to Delaware. But, we have on some occasions installed a PCMS with "TRAFFIC PATTERN CHANGE AHEAD". All road closures get advance warning and closure messages. For weekend or overnight road closures a reopening message is not needed because our messages provide the timeframe. For long term closures, which we would try to avoid so they are not a common occurrence, we rarely run reopening messages. The logic is you provide messaging for non-standard conditions and when the closure message and detour signing are taken down that means the closure is no longer in effect. 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 remember the location. The only possible negatives, assuming the sign is placed in a safe location, would be sign pollution and as Sal mentioned contractor supplied boards that may be rentals or planned to move to another project. 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.
OH	We do not have a policy or standard practice for such in Ohio.
OR	Oregon does not have a policy or practice to use a PCMS to alert users that a road closure has ended.
PA	At PennDOT we offer great flexibility for the use of PCMS. We only require PCMS on certain freeway setups. Using PCMS for detours would only be used when a unique situation occurs where standard signing doesn't fulfill the need of the driver.
SD	South Dakota does not have a policy on the use of PCMS and I do not know of a situation where they have been used to inform drivers that a detour has ended.
TX	We do not.
VA	On behalf of Ray Khoury, Virginia DOT 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. 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 work coming up, 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 ahead signs might be 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.
VT	The only situation I can think of where we use PCMS to alert drivers that a roadway has been opened is for the short period of time between the roadway re-opening and the static detour signs being removed/covered.
WI	WisDOT does not routinely use PCMS for re-opening roadways. We did have a request from a politician to do just that. I did not hear if the region ended up using the PCMS for that purpose.
WV	WV DOT does not have standard practice or policy to utilize CMS for road openings.
WY	Not at WYdot.