Memo

To: Coalition Team

From: Milan Bhatt

Re: Preliminary Strategy For Burlington-Dubuque Intersection Issue

Date: February 3, 2004

# Statement of The Problem and Initial Strategy

The Coalition has expressed a concern that the traffic light at the intersection of Burlington and Dubuque streets does not allow sufficient time for pedestrians of all abilities to cross. Our strategy in tackling this problem will involve the following components: monitoring the actual time in seconds that the traffic light allows for pedestrian crossing; contacting Anissa Williams, the cities’ traffic engineer, and other key individuals within Iowa City responsible for traffic signal issues, researching laws, codes, and regulations on the local, state, and federal level to determine what standards in fact control Iowa City’s installation, maintenance and renovation of traffic lights; and keeping in close contact with the Coalition members who have expressed this concern and updating them on discoveries and developments that we make in the Clinic.

Our initial research has led us to an important federal manual—the Manual On Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)—that enumerates guidelines, standards, and options for application to on a local level. The manual may be found at <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov> or using the link on the Department of Transportation’s website. Section 4 of the Manual titled “Traffic Signals” is the most important section for our purposes. We have been able to establish that the Iowa Code and Iowa State Department of Transportation regulations refer to the Manual as a source of their own policies. However, we still need to determine exactly what portions of the manual have been incorporated, whether the provisions adopted serve a suggestive or binding role, and what deviations from those provisions are allowable.

**Local Level**

## JCCOG

Johnson County Council of Governments (JCCOG) is a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Iowa City Urbanized Area, which, under the guidance of a public policy board, provides leadership, expertise, and services to member communities and agencies in Johnson County, Iowa. The Transportation Planning Division is charged with fulfilling the federal requirements of the 3-C transportation planning process. This process is required of all urbanized areas to maintain eligibility for grant programs of the Federal Transit Administration and Federal Highway Administration.  
  
The 3-C transportation planning process consists of a comprehensive, coordinated and continuing planning effort for all modes of transportation. In addition to planning projects which are required by Iowa DOT and U.S. DOT, each year the Transportation Planning Division assembles a work program of projects requested by JCCOG members. These projects include short- and long-range transportation development plans, corridor studies, *intersection analyses*, survey reports, and review of development projects.

The most important person to note from the committee is the Traffic and Engineer Planner, **Anissa Williams**: (319) 356-5254, [anissa-williams@iowa-city.org](mailto:anissa-williams@iowa-city.org)), whom we will want to contact with inquiries concerning the history of this issue, the appropriate channels through which we may want to address the Coalitions’ concerns, possible workable solutions and the possibility of her direct involvement (i.e. attending a Coalition meeting). It is worth noting that according to Iowa City’s code, the traffic engineer must seek approval from the City Council only when installing and removing TCDs, not necessarily to make adjustments.

## Iowa City Code

The following provisions appear under Title 9 of the Iowa City code: “Motor Vehicles and Traffic.” In a sense, this section is our “home base” on the local level as we explore further.

Chapter 1 of the Title 9 designates either the city manager or designee to the following responsibilities:

*“to determine the installation and proper timing and maintenance of* ***traffic control devices****, to conduct engineering analyses of traffic accidents and to devise remedial measures, to conduct engineering investigations of traffic conditions, to plan the operation of traffic on the streets and highways of this city, to cooperate with other city officials in the development of ways and means to improve traffic conditions and to carry out the additional powers and duties imposed by ordinances of this city.”*

It will be necessary for us to investigate whom in the case of Iowa City this individual is.

In addition, Chapter 2 provides:

*“All traffic-control devices shall conform to the manual and specifications approved by the Iowa Department of Transportation or its successor. All devices required hereunder for a particular purpose shall, so far as practicable, be* ***uniform*** *as to type and location throughout the City. All traffic-control devices so erected and not inconsistent with the provisions of State law or this Title shall be official traffic-control devices.” (1994 Code)*

### Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices

MUTCD:

The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) is incorporated by reference in 23 CFR 655, subpart F, approved by the Federal Highway Administration, and recognized as the national standard for traffic control devices used on all public roads. The purpose of this final rule is to revise standards, guidance, options, and supporting information relating to the traffic control devices in all parts of the MUTCD, to expedite traffic, promote uniformity, improve safety, and incorporate technology advances in traffic control device application. The MUTCD, with these changes incorporated, is being designated as the 2003 edition of the MUTCD. However, be advised that for those states who have yet to adopt the 2003 edition, the Millennium Edition is still in effect.

The following are the compliance dates for various subsections of Section 4E, the most pertinent section of the Manual for our purposes.

**Section 4E.06 Accessible Pedestrian Signals—**new section in Millennium Edition—January 17, 2005\*.  
  
**Section 4E.07 Countdown Pedestrian Signals—**new section—10 years from the effective date of the Final Rule for the 2003 MUTCD for countdown pedestrian signal hardware = Dec. 22, 2013; 3 years from the effective date of the Final Rule for the 2003 MUTCD for operational requirements of countdown pedestrian signals = Dec. 22, 2006.  
  
**Section 4E.09 Accessible Pedestrian Signal Detectors—**new section in Millennium Edition—January 17, 2005\*.  
  
\*\***Section 4E.10 Pedestrian Intervals and Signal Phases—**pedestrian clearance time sufficient to travel to far side of the traveled way—5 years from the effective date of the Final Rule for the 2003 MUTCD = Dec. 22, 2008.

\*\* This section is of particular concern, although the standards it lays out may or may not be to our liking. As per the format of the manual it distinguishes between “Guidance,” “Option,” and “Support” categories. We will need to consult the introductory section of the manual to understand the exact function of them. More to the point, this subsection appears to provide a minimum pedestrian crossing interval of only 7 seconds, in some cases as short as 4 seconds. It also suggests a 1.2m (4ft) per second rate for the purposes of sufficient crossing time, allowing a less rate for pedestrians “who use wheelchairs.”

Peer to Peer program:

FHWA's P2P TCD provides a way for transportation officials to get answers to their questions about traffic control device issues. The program quickly connects volunteers with expertise in specific traffic control devices with professionals who need guidance with technical issues pertaining to the MUTCD and related technologies. This assistance will in turn help agencies and the traveling public realize the full benefits of improved safety and optimized traffic performance.

Active since January 2003, the P2P TCD program has already demonstrated numerous effective examples of peers helping peers around the country:

* In Hughson, California, the city planners requested guidance in placing traffic signals at a difficult five-point intersection;
* In Rifle, Colorado, guidance was needed in designing mid-block crosswalks where traffic signals were not present, but vehicles were expected to stop for all pedestrians.

In both cases, a peer with extensive experience with the unique situation, and knowledgeable in the application of the guidelines, standards, and options in the MUTCD and other documents, was able to provide the necessary information to guide the decision-making process. These are just samples of the many successful collaborations brought about by the P2P. We can contact the program at [**P2P@fhwa.dot.gov**](mailto:P2P@fhwa.dot.gov) or **1-888-700-PEER (7337)**.

Iowa Code and IDOT

Iowa currently uses the 2000 edition of the MUTCD. The Iowa Code has adopted it with exceptions listed under Administrative Rule Chapter 761, 130.1(1) of the IDOT.

None of these exceptions pertain to pedestrian intervals.

The Iowa Department of Transportation in Iowa, however, has also adopted its own manual to “supplement” the MUTCD and “supercede all previous procedures, instructions, and memorandum with regard to the installation and maintenance of signs.” (see <http://www.dot.state.ia.us/traffic/manuals/pdf/02a-06.pdf>).

SECTION INCOMPLETE

Hopefully this information will help us move forward with this issue.