



Traffic Guidelines Manual

ORIGINATOR State Traffic Engineer	2-15-36
CHAPTER 2	Signing
SECTION 15	Comprehensive Guiding Policies
SUBJECT 36	Distance Signs, D2-Series & Post-Interchange E8-Series

A. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for the use of Distance signs on State Highways under Department of Transportation jurisdiction. This policy guidance will address the selection of destinations, consistent determination of appropriate distances, sign design, and typical Distance sign placement.

General guidance on selection of destinations can be found in the [MUTCD 2009](#) edition, Sections [2D.37](#) and [2E.35](#). Specific guidance on the selection of destination cities can be found in TGM 2-15-5.

Guidance on the location of Distance signs is found in MUTCD Sections [2D.38](#) and [2E.39](#).

This policy does not apply to Interchange Sequence signs, which are addressed in MUTCD Section [2E.36](#).

B. Definitions

Distance Signs are defined as guide signs displaying a sequence of one to three destinations ahead with the distance to reach those destinations.

Freeways are defined as divided highways with fully controlled access at interchanges only. Interstate Highways are freeways with the interstate route designation.

Expressways are defined as divided highways with partially controlled access by a combination of interchanges, at-grade intersections, and driveways.

Conventional Highways are defined as streets or roads other than freeways or expressways. They may be divided or undivided, two-lane or multi-lane, and access is available at intersections and driveways.

National Control Cities are Chicago, Milwaukee, Beloit, Rockford, Janesville, Madison, Wisconsin Dells, La Crosse, Albert Lea, Eau Claire, St. Paul, Sheboygan, and Green Bay.

Regional Control Cities are defined as

- a. Urban areas in Wisconsin or within 60 miles of the state line with a population in the most recent decennial census of 30,000 or more,
- b. Other communities, such as Sturgeon Bay, Woodruff, Minocqua, and Lake Geneva, which are approved by the State Traffic Engineer based on their character as widely known tourism destinations, and
- c. Urban areas on or north of Highway 64 with a population exceeding 3500, and urban areas south of Highway 64 with a population exceeding 10,000.

Major Crossroads or Side Roads, in most cases, should be state highways, but may be a county highway or local arterial serving a nearby community.

C. Policy

General Guidance

- The combination Destination Direction and Distance signs, such as is designated D1-1a, D1-2a, or D1-3a in MUTCD, **shall not** be used on state highways.
- Unincorporated communities **shall not** be displayed on Distance signs unless the community is designated a Regional Control City.
- Traffic generator supplemental sign destinations **shall not** be displayed on Distance signs.
- The sign design format for distance signs **shall** use upper and lower case letters.
- The letter sizes **shall** be appropriate for the highway class; minimum 6-inch/4½-inch on conventional highways and minimum 8-inch/6-inch on expressways and freeways.

The selection of destinations **shall** be solely for the purpose of guidance and information for the non-local state highway driver, and **shall not** be used to promote communities, facilities, or preferential routes.

The first line of the sign **shall** designate the next selected “destination” in the direction of travel. If used, a second line of the sign *may* designate the second, or an interim, destination of importance in the direction of travel. The bottom line **shall** designate a National Control City or Regional Control City or the last incorporated city or village of the greatest significance, in that order of priority.

Distances **shall** be rounded up or down, as appropriate, to display the even mile.

Specific Guidance – Conventional Highways

The first destination on a Distance sign on a conventional state highway **shall** display either the next incorporated community (city or village), or the next major crossroad or side road, whichever is deemed the most beneficial information for the driver.

If used, the second line of the Distance sign *may* display the second major crossroad or a subsequent incorporated community served by the state highway. Selection of the community *may* be guided by use of the comparative population and distance formula in TGM 2-15-5. Selection *may* also be varied on successive Distance signs to display alternative communities served by the route.

The bottom line of a Distance sign on a state highway **shall** designate a National Control City or Regional Control City or the last incorporated city or village of the greatest significance, in that order of priority. The bottom line control city should be the same on all successive Distance signs along the route until that city is reached.

If the conventional state highway does not enter the corporate limits of a community, the community **shall not** be displayed on the Distance sign, but *may* appear on a Direction sign (D1-series) at the appropriate location.

Distances to a crossroad **shall** be rounded to the nearest even mile.

Distances to a community *may* be measured differently depending on the size of the community and how the state highway passes through it.

- If the community is not very large and the highway serves the central business district, the distance should be measured to that “downtown” area and *may* be rounded down.
- If the highway does not serve the downtown, the distance *may* be measured to the municipal limits or a major crossroad within the municipal limits and *may* be rounded up.
- If the city is large, the distance *may* be measured to a major crossroad or municipal feature within the city limits.

Specific Guidance – Expressways

The first destination on a Distance sign on an expressway **shall** display either the next incorporated community (city or village), or the next major crossroad or interchange, whichever is deemed the most beneficial information for the driver.

If used, the second line of the Distance sign *may* display the second major crossroad or interchange or a subsequent incorporated community served by the state expressway. Selection of the community *may* be guided by use of the comparative population and distance formula in TGM 2-15-5. Selection *may* also be varied on successive Distance signs to display alternative communities served by the route.

The bottom line of a Distance sign on an expressway **shall** designate a National Control City or Regional Control City or the last incorporated city or village of the greatest significance, in that order of priority. The bottom line control city should be the same on all successive Distance signs along the route until that city is reached.

If the state expressway does not enter the corporate limits of a community, the community **shall not** be displayed on the Distance sign, but *may* appear on a Direction sign (D1-series) or Exit sign (E1- or E4-series) at the appropriate location.

Distances to a crossroad or interchange **shall** include the exit ramp and **shall** be rounded to the nearest even mile.

Distances to a community *may* be measured differently depending on the size of the community and how the state expressway passes through it.

- If the community is not very large and the highway serves the central business district, the distance should be measured to that “downtown” area and *may* be rounded down.
- If the highway does not serve the downtown, the distance *may* be measured to the municipal limits or an interchange or major crossroad within the municipal limits and *may* be rounded up.
- If the city is large, the distance *may* be measured to an interchange or major crossroad or municipal feature within the city limits.

Specific Guidance – Freeways

The first destination on a Distance sign on a freeway **shall** display either the next interchange, or the next incorporated community (city or village), whichever is deemed the most beneficial information for the driver.

If used, the second line of the Distance sign *may* display the second interchange or a subsequent incorporated community served by the freeway. Selection of the community *may* be guided by use of the comparative population and distance formula in TGM 2-15-5. Selection *may* also be varied on successive Distance signs to display alternative communities served by the route.

The bottom line of a Distance sign on a freeway **shall** designate a National Control City or Regional Control City or the last incorporated city or village of the greatest significance, in that order of priority. The bottom line control city should be the same on all successive Distance signs along the route until that city is reached.

If the freeway does not enter or pass within one mile of the corporate limits of a community, the community **shall not** be displayed on the Distance sign, but *may* appear on an Exit sign (E1- or E4- or E9-series) at the appropriate location.

If the freeway does pass within one mile of the corporate limits of a community, the community *may* be displayed on the Distance sign, and *may* appear on an Exit sign (E1- or E4- or E9-series) at the appropriate location.

Distances to an interchange **shall** include the exit ramp to the crossroad and **shall** be rounded to the nearest even mile.

Distances to a community *may* be measured differently depending on the size of the community and how the freeway serves it.

- If the community is not very large and the freeway serves the central business district, the distance should be measured to a “downtown” interchange and *may* be rounded down.

- If the freeway does not serve the downtown, the distance *may* be measured to the municipal limits or a major interchange within the municipal limits and *may* be rounded up.
- If the city is large, the distance *may* be measured to a major interchange or municipal feature within the city limits.