

# Memorandum

**To:** KEN MURRAY  
DEPUTY DIVISION CHIEF (ACTING)  
DIVISION OF DESIGN

**Date:** 09/02/2025

**From:** ROSE BISHOP  
Office Chief (Acting)  
Standards and Procedures  
Landscape Architecture  
Division of Design

JOY TITE  
Office Chief  
Support and Planning  
Landscape Architecture  
Division of Design

**Subject: UPDATES TO THE COMMUNITY IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM POLICY AND GUIDELINES**

This memorandum updates and clarifies policy and guidance for the Community Identification Program, located in Chapter 29, Section 10, Article 1, of the Caltrans Project Development Procedures Manual (PDPM).

## Definitions

“Public agency” is described in the PDPM, Chapter 29, Section 9, Article 1 “General Procedure.”

“Local communities” are defined as Census-Designated Places (CDP), unincorporated communities, towns outside a city boundary, or neighborhoods, if these communities are listed or shown on their public agency's general plan.

Public agency “seals” are defined as an officially adopted emblem or insignia that is used to designate official public agency documents. These seals typically contain the public agency's name, date of incorporation, and images that depict the culture, history, or values of the community. Seals can include the public agency motto or slogan. Officially adopted public agency seals are not processed through the transportation art program and no copyright license is required for their installation.

## “Local Community” Sponsorship by Public Agencies

Public agencies may sponsor installation and maintenance of community identification for local communities if the location meets all three of the following conditions:

1. it is not viewable from the highway,
2. it is oriented to be viewed primarily from a local street, road, or other public space, and
3. it has maintenance access from a local street or road.

Institutions, commercially developed neighborhoods, and business districts are not considered local communities for the purposes of the community identification program. Some examples are college campuses, organizations, or planned communities where the name of the community is also the business name. State parks and National Forest lands are examples of other areas that are not considered communities.

### **Exception to the Number of Community Identification Allowed**

Within Caltrans right-of-way, more than a single installation of community identification or gateway monument may be permitted for a public agency or local community, per each highway approach in each direction, if it complies with the other requirements in this policy memorandum and the location meets all three of the following conditions:

1. it is not viewable from the highway,
2. it is oriented to be viewed primarily from a local street, road, or other public space, and
3. it has maintenance access from a local street or road.

### **Local Agency Seals**

Local agencies may place their seals within Caltrans' right-of-way if the seals are not legible from the highway and are placed as aesthetic accents. They will not be considered community identification for the purpose of counting the number allowed per highway approach. Caltrans reserves the right to deny excessive use of local agency seals to reduce driver distraction.

Seals must not exceed 48" in any direction, and are typically placed on the outside of rails, girders, or structure end pilasters.

### **Requirements for Community Identification**

Proposed community identification must:

- include the name of the public agency or local community. It may also include a short phrase that welcomes travelers and/or an officially adopted

slogan that has been associated with the public agency or community. See California MUTCD (CA MUTCD) Section 2A., Word Messages for guidance.

- Examples: Welcome to (City); (County Name), The Friendly County; Welcome to (City), The Friendly City.
- mount text vertically at right angles to the direction of, and facing, the traffic that they are intended to serve (CA MUTCD Section 2A.20, Orientation). Text must be oriented to be read from left to right, top to bottom.
  - position text perpendicular to the traveled way of those it is intended to serve. In general, 45° to 90° is considered legible with minimal distraction.
- not display text that makes special interest, private, religious, social movement, or political statements.
- not display symbols such as flags, icons, or social movement symbology.
- not display telephone numbers, street addresses, internet addresses (URL), QR codes, or similar.
- be integrated with or placed upon a required engineered transportation feature.
- be placed within the physical boundaries of the public agency or local community for which it is proposed.
- not be placed within Caltrans' right-of-way upon trees, rocks, or other natural features.
- not adversely affect existing structures, drainage patterns, stormwater runoff quality, landscaping, or natural vegetation.
- not require the removal or damage of trees or other vegetation for visibility, or harm trees during construction.
- be composed of materials that are durable for the projected lifespan.
- be fully funded for design, installation, maintenance, restoration, and removal by the public agency for its projected lifespan.
- not restrict sight distance.
- not include reflective or glaring surface finishes.
- not include moving elements (kinetic art) or simulate any type of movement.
- not make use of or simulate colors or combinations of colors or shapes usually reserved for official traffic control devices described in the CA MUTCD.
  - not imitate traffic control devices.
  - not make motorists so accustomed to seeing MUTCD colors or shapes that they ignore traffic control devices or traffic safety. See CA MUTCD 2A.04, Excessive Use of Signs, for guidance.
- not obscure or interfere with traffic control devices.

- not be mounted on posts or other structures used to mount or maintain traffic control devices.
- not interfere with airspace above the roadway.
- not create a distraction to transportation system users. For example, it should be large enough to interpret at highway speed, but not be so large that it demands attention from the motorist. See CA MUTCD 2A.06B, Design of Signs, for guidance.
  - be appropriate to its proposed setting.
  - be in proper scale with its surroundings.
- not include illumination (such as blinking, flashing, changing, or intermittent lights) that distracts or impairs the vision of transportation system users. Other lighting, such as those used to illuminate the community identification, may be permitted on existing structures only when approved by Headquarters Division of Maintenance-Structure Maintenance and Investigations.
- conform to provisions of the California Outdoor Advertising Act.
  - not include commercial logos or symbols, or any that are closely related to or imitate commercial enterprises, whether or not the business is still active.
  - not include business names, trade names, jingles, or commercial slogans.
- be designed to minimize ongoing maintenance needs. Caltrans-approved protective graffiti coatings may be required.
- be located where the required maintenance can be safely performed as specified in the encroachment permit, the maintenance agreement, and in conformance with Caltrans' procedures.
- be consistent with Headquarters Maintenance Division, Structure Maintenance & Investigations (SM&I) inspection requirements, including the following:
  - Paint used on structures must not fill or obscure cracks. Latex or other flexible type paints may be used on concrete structures only with written permission from the Headquarters Maintenance Division, SM&I
  - Painting of steel structures will only be permitted with written permission from the Headquarters Maintenance Division, SM&I.
  - Community identification on concrete structures should avoid load-carrying, stress-bearing structural members, including, but not limited to bridge girders, soffits, columns, and piers.
  - Community identification must not impair the necessary inspection of bridges, retaining walls, and other structures.
  - To facilitate Caltrans' inspection access to structures, community identification may be placed on removable panels if they are not an integral part of a structure.

- Chipping, blasting, or in any way modifying existing concrete surfaces is prohibited, unless required for inspection by Headquarters Maintenance Division, SM&I.

Additional guidance for placing community identification on highway bridge structures is available from Headquarters Division of Engineering Services – Structure & Engineering Services (SES), Office of Transportation Architecture.

## APPROVAL RECOMMENDED



08/27/2025

ROSE BISHOP  
Office Chief (Acting)  
Standards and Procedures  
Landscape Architecture  
Division of Design

  
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08/29/2025

JOY TITE  
Office Chief  
Support and Planning  
Landscape Architecture  
Division of Design

## APPROVED



09/02/2025

KEN MURRAY  
Deputy Division Chief (Acting)  
Landscape Architecture Program  
Division of Design

Date

- c: Deputy District Directors, Design  
Adrienne St. John, Office Chief (Acting), Complete Streets  
Devinder Sandhu, Office Chief, Headquarters Encroachment & Outdoor Advertising Permits Office  
Neidy Pinuelas, Office Chief (Acting), Headquarters Local Assistance Office of Guidance and Oversight  
Headquarters Landscape Architecture District Coordinators  
District Landscape Architects  
District Community Identification Coordinators

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