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FLUORESCENT YELLOW GREEN SCHOOL AREA SIGNS REGIONAL ROADS

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, April 18, 2007, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Staff be authorized to install fluorescent yellow green school area signs in addition to the regulatory blue and white signs at all school areas with reduced speed limits on Regional roads.
2. Staff be authorized to replace existing blue and white school area and school crossing signs, at appropriate locations, with fluorescent yellow green school area and school crossing signs.
3. Upon amendment of the *Highway Traffic Act*, The Regional Municipality of York adopt the use of fluorescent yellow green school zone signs at all school areas on Regional roads.
4. The Regional Chair forward a letter to the Province of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation, requesting that the *Highway Traffic Act* be amended to include fluorescent yellow green school signs.
5. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities in The Regional Municipality of York, the Minister of Transportation and to both York Region School Boards.

2. PURPOSE

This report proposes the installation of fluorescent yellow green school zone signs, in addition to the regulatory blue and white school signs, at school areas on Regional roads, where they are not otherwise precluded by Provincial Regulation. This report also responds to a report, dated January 2, 2007, from the Town of Newmarket, endorsed by their Council, which considered the installation of fluorescent yellow green school zone signs on local streets within the Town.

3. BACKGROUND

School area and school crossing signs have traditionally been white lettering and graphics on a blue background. These signs have been used for many years by road authorities throughout the province and are endorsed by the Ministry of Transportation.

The traditional blue and white school area sign (*see Attachment 1 Figure A*) and school crossing sign (*see Attachment 1 Figure B*) are considered as pedestrian warning signs and are recognized signs in Book 6 of the *Ontario Traffic Manual*. The *Ontario Traffic Manual* is a volume of manuals that provide information and guidance for transportation agencies to ensure uniform application, design and operation of traffic control devices throughout Ontario. Book 6 specifically refers to the selection and application of “Warning Signs” which includes Pedestrian Warning signs.

Essentially there are three typical situations where it is necessary to provide advanced notice to motorists approaching a school:

- 1) A school area sign notifies motorists they are approaching a school area and that children may be in the area.
- 2) A school crossing sign notifies motorists that children may be crossing the road.
- 3) A school area sign in conjunction with a reduced speed limit. This reduced speed limit can be in effect during school hours only and controlled by flashing amber beacons.

These situations may be used individually or in combination where applicable.

3.1 School Area

A school area sign is a pentagon shape, with white lettering on a blue background and is placed in areas where children walk along or cross a road to attend a school. This sign, with its unique shape, warns road users in advance so they are prepared for this situation and can exercise caution when passing through a school area.

According to the *Ontario Traffic Manual*, school area signs should only be used where the school is adjacent to a major highway or an arterial road that children walk next to or cross. The installation of these signs is initiated by the local municipality or school board. Any signs on Regional roads are subject to review and approval by the Regional Municipality of York. School area signs must be reviewed on an annual basis due to the changing nature of school locations and pedestrian access routes. Any redundant signs must be removed if they are no longer required. In the Regional Municipality of York, on Regional roads, there are approximately thirty-two locations with school area signs.

3.2 School Crossing

A school crossing sign is a rectangular shape, with white lettering on a blue background and is placed in areas where children cross a road to attend a school. A school crossing sign identifies a location where significant volumes of school children cross the road on their way to or from school. School crossing signs can be in two forms, one providing advance warning of the upcoming crossing and the other providing a warning at the exact location of the crossing. These signs are not regulatory and are not included in the *Highway Traffic Act* as they are considered warning signs. In the Regional Municipality of York, on Regional roads, there are approximately twenty-five locations with school crossing signs.

3.3 School Area with Reduced Speed Limit

The reduction of a speed limit in a school area requires the installation of a combination sign that includes a school area sign with an additional sign stating “School Zone Maximum Speed” or “School Zone Maximum Speed When Flashing” sign. This type of signage is installed in defined school speed zones where speed limits have been decreased through appropriate bylaws, and during school times, effectively making these signs regulatory in nature.

The *Highway Traffic Act* regulates the size and colour of school area signs where speed limits are reduced during school times. Regulation 615 of the *Highway Traffic Act* requires that these signs consist of white figures and symbols on a blue background and include a speed limit sign complete with amber flashers (*see Attachment 2 Figure A*). These flashers operate during school hours to advise motorists they are entering a school area and that the speed limit is reduced only when the flashers are in operation. At all other times of the day, and on week-ends, the speed limit reverts to the regular posted speed limit. In the Regional Municipality of York, on Regional roads, there are approximately nine locations where school areas have reduced speed limits. These installations are the only ones specifically set out as white on blue signs in the Regulations of the *Highway Traffic Act*. Fluorescent yellow green school zone signs (*see Attachment 2 Figure B and Figure C*) are currently not regulated in the *Highway Traffic Act*.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Even though fluorescent yellow green school zone signs are not a recognized sign in the *Ontario Traffic Manual*, nor have they been endorsed by the Ministry of Transportation, they have been installed in some local municipalities in York Region as well as many other areas of Ontario. The Towns of East Gwillimbury, Georgina, and Richmond Hill have installed fluorescent yellow green school zone signs at school areas on their road network on a permanent basis. The Town of Newmarket has installed fluorescent yellow green school zone signs on their road network at one location on a trial basis and the City of Vaughan has installed them on their road network at two key locations on a trial basis.

The Regional Municipality of Durham has had fluorescent yellow green school zone signs on their road network for some time and recently their Council endorsed the report from the Town of Newmarket considering the use of fluorescent yellow green school zone signs. The Regional Municipality of Durham has sent a letter (*see Attachment 3*) to the Minister of Transportation outlining their support for the inclusion of fluorescent yellow green school zone signs in the *Highway Traffic Act*.

The *Ontario Traffic Manual* does refer to the sheeting to create the fluorescent yellow green school zone sign, but does not specifically endorse its use. While fluorescent yellow green school zone signs provide better visibility in lower light conditions, and are more conspicuous than blue and white signs, there are no demonstrated safety improvements resulting from their installation.

Regardless of the inclusion of fluorescent yellow green school zone signs in the *Highway Traffic Act* or the *Ontario Traffic Manual*, any road authority has the option of implementing fluorescent yellow green school zone signs as a standard treatment for school crossings or school areas if they choose to. To maintain consistency and driver expectation, the decision to implement fluorescent yellow green school zone signs should encompass all required locations on Regional roads throughout the entire Region.

In areas where the traditional blue and white school area signs are installed on Regional roads that do not have a “reduced speed limit when flashing” indication, these signs can be removed and replaced with the fluorescent yellow green school zone signs as there is no enforcement issue. These signs only provide information to the drivers.

Alternatively, all of the current blue and white school area and school crossing signs on Regional roads can remain in place until such time fluorescent yellow green school zone signs are adopted into the *Highway Traffic Act* and ultimately the *Ontario Traffic Manual*.

4.1 School Area

There are thirty-two locations within the Region with School Area signs. These school areas tend to change from year to year based on enrolment and need. Therefore, they must be reviewed, with input from the school board and the local municipality, on a regular basis to ensure they are signed accordingly. These signs are not covered under the *Highway Traffic Act* and are not enforceable as they provide a warning only. In order to provide consistency throughout the Regional road network, it is intended to replace these signs with fluorescent yellow green school zone signs at all appropriate locations on Regional roads.

4.2 School Crossing

There are twenty-five locations within the Regional Municipality of York with School Crossing signs. These signs are not covered under the *Highway Traffic Act* and are not enforceable as they provide a warning only. Some of these locations are at signalized intersections where, based on the *Ontario Traffic Manual*, they are not permitted and

must be removed. Upon consultation with the school boards and local municipalities, the existing locations will be assessed and any redundant signs will be removed. Where school crossing signs are required, fluorescent yellow green school zone signs will be installed. In order to provide consistency throughout the Regional road network, it is intended to replace school crossing signs with fluorescent yellow green school zone signs at all appropriate locations on Regional roads.

4.3 School Area with Reduced Speed Limits

There are nine locations in York Region with blue and white school area signs complete with flashers and reduced speed limits (*see Attachment 2 Figure A*). It is intended to install fluorescent yellow green school zone signs, where appropriate, throughout the Regional road network to achieve consistency. However, in order to comply with the *Highway Traffic Act*, and ensure that speed limits in school areas are enforceable, fluorescent yellow green school zone signs would have to be installed in addition to the existing white on blue signs. Once fluorescent yellow green school zone signs are adopted into the *Highway Traffic Act*, the original blue and white signs can be removed.

4.4 Implementation

As fluorescent yellow green school zone signs are becoming more common throughout the GTA, it is now appropriate for the Region to implement a conversion plan to replace the traditional blue and white school area and school crossing signs and to again request the Minister of Transportation to adopt them into the *Highway Traffic Act*.

It is proposed that the Regional Chair be authorized to send a letter to the Province of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation, requesting amendments to the *Highway Traffic Act* to include fluorescent yellow green school zone signs.

Additionally, a letter will be sent to all local municipalities and both school boards in the Region outlining the implementation of the conversion of blue and white school area and school crossing signs to fluorescent yellow green school zone signs and that any blue and white school crossing signs will be removed at signalized intersections. This letter will request a listing of school crossings, in each local municipality, where crossing guards are used in conjunction with school crossing areas.

4.5 Status for Approval from the Ministry of Transportation

Regional staff has discussed the timeline of the approval of the use of fluorescent yellow green school signs, throughout the Province, with the Ministry of Transportation staff. The Ministry of Transportation staff has suggested the approval to use these signs is forthcoming, however, they have not indicated a specific time frame.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are approximately 96 school area and 54 school crossing signs on Regional roads that would require replacement. Therefore, the estimated cost to convert all required

school area and school crossing signage, on Regional roads, to fluorescent yellow green school zone signs is approximately \$13,500. The cost of manufacturing and installing the fluorescent yellow green school signs is included in the 2007 Roads Program Budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Uniformity and consistency of signage is a principle of road safety. Driver expectancy is imperative and provides a safe road network for all motorists. In order to achieve uniformity, the conversion to fluorescent yellow green school zone signage should be undertaken on a Region-wide basis. As these signs are becoming more common on the local road network, it is necessary to now install fluorescent yellow green school zone signs on the Regional road network. The Towns of East Gwillimbury, Georgina, and Richmond Hill have installed fluorescent yellow green school zone signs on their road network on a permanent basis and, on a trial basis, the Town of Newmarket and the City of Vaughan have installed fluorescent yellow green school zone signs at key locations on their road network. All local municipalities would benefit from a consistent school zone signing approach.

7. CONCLUSION

In response to a report from the Town of Newmarket, it is proposed that the Region shall adopt the use of fluorescent yellow green school zone signs at all school areas on Regional roads and implement a sign initiative to install fluorescent yellow green school zone signs at all school areas on Regional roads.

It is also proposed that the Region petition the Province of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation, to amend the *Highway Traffic Act* to include fluorescent yellow green school zone signs.

For more information on this report, contact Brian Harrison, Director, Operations, Roads Branch at extension 5205 in the Transportation and Works Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)