

Design Advisory

From Mark Van Port Fleet, Engineer of Design

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Index: Design Exceptions
Road Design Manual Section
14.11 and Bridge Design
Manual Section 2.02.15

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Design Advisory should be
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Timeliness of Design Exception Submittals

Submittals of Design Exceptions on a timely basis are essential to maintain the project schedule and provide an approved design where conditions may inhibit designers from meeting the required design criteria. Road Design Manual Section 14.11 and Bridge Design Manual 2.02.15 emphasize that design exceptions be identified and completed during the Scope Verification Process. Completion includes examination of crash history, coordinating justification with Lansing Geometrics and submittal to Lansing Design, and subsequently to the FHWA where appropriate, to obtain approval prior to development of Base Plans. Projects that proceed without Exception approval risk re-design of project elements or potential delays in the project schedule.

The FHWA conducted a review of our Design Exception process. The review was performed jointly with MDOT staff and included design exceptions processed for trunkline and Local Agency projects from 2002 – 2005. It examined submittal timeliness, completeness, and justification content of Design Exceptions. Their report findings, dated September 2006, found that 86% of Local Agency projects and 98% of trunkline projects with MDOT oversight had Design Exception approval after The Plan Review stage. Projects with FHWA oversight had 71% approved after OEC.

As a result of the study, MDOT has agreed to emphasize early submittals of Design Exceptions. MDOT agreed to implement measures to improve timeliness, including the addition of a checklist of geometric elements with the Scoping Verification process and a yearly summary report of timeliness.

MDOT staff developing project scopes are encouraged to use a scoping checklist of geometric elements to identify existing substandard geometric conditions and include funds for remedy in the proposed budget, particularly with 4R work.

It is incumbent upon Project Managers to ensure that all geometric elements have been met or to submit the appropriate Design Exceptions for approval. Plan changes that occur later in design need to be examined for design exception impact. Exceptions, if needed, should be processed as soon as practical.

Late submittals risk delay in project schedules. If not approved, significant re-design may be needed. Normally, four to six weeks should be allowed from receipt of submittal at Lansing Design to receiving approval. Longer approval time may be needed if questions or objections occur and additional revisions are required.