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Removing I-296 Signs in Grand Rapids

HTO-32

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HRA-05

As part of the Positive Guidance Demonstration Project, the State of Michigan determined that the signing for I-296 in Grand Rapids is a potential source of confusion for motorists. Further, because of the geometric design of the interchange of I-96 and U.S. 131/I-296, and because of the complete overlap of I-296 with U.S. 131, the signing for the interchange becomes unnecessarily complex. Also, the 600 foot sight distance to the off movement increases the probability of driver error. In reviewing Michigan's interim report on the demonstration, it occurred to us that the overlapping of routes in the area (M-37 with I-96, and I-296 with U.S. 131) should be eliminated. At our meeting with the State in January, we recommended the State investigate relocating M-37 and eliminating I-296.

As we understand it, the State agrees with that recommendation and would like to remove the I-296 designation from all the signs and the official State map. It is concerned, however, that such a move might result in the removal of I-296 from the Interstate System. Consequently, it has recommended removing I-296 only from the major guide signs, leaving the designation on trailblazers and the official State map. It is our view that this compromise is not in the best interest of the motorist. While it would certainly make the guide signing simpler, it would increase the discrepancy between the maps and the signs, and play havoc with driver expectancy.

The purpose of signing route numbers is for motorist safety and convenience, not to indicate what routes are eligible for what kind of Federal-aid. We have been unable to find any regulation, law, or policy statement which could be construed as prohibiting the removal of all the highway (and map) references to I-296 or where such removal would have any bearing on the retention of this route on the Interstate System.

The AASHTO policy statement on marking Interstate highways in urban areas states they should "be carefully marked for the safety and convenience of the travelling public" We would recommend that the State be given FHWA approval and advised to obtain approval of the AASHTO Executive Committee.

We certainly appreciate the cooperation and participation of the State and the Division Office in the Positive Guidance Demonstration Program. We believe there will be significant improvement in both safety and traffic operations at the I-96-U.S. 131 interchange as a result of the project.

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