



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS**  
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB  
Item: 5  
Date: 10/24/13

October 17, 2013

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Mary R. Bradford, Director of Parks *MBradford*  
Michael F. Riley, Deputy Director, Department of Parks *MR*  
Mitra Pedoeem, Chief, Park Development Division *Mitra Pedoeem*

**FROM:** Lucas Bonney, Project Manager, Park Development Division (301-495-2572) *LB*  
Patricia McManus, Section Supervisor, Park Development Division *Pm*

**SUBJECT:** Project Briefing: Hard Surface Trail Signage Design Guidelines and Sign Plan for Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail

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Staff seeks any comments or guidance that the Planning Board may wish to offer on this project, as it will set future sign standards for the hard surface trail system. Comments or guidance received from the public and the Planning Board will be incorporated into the final project. The project is expected to be completed with new signage installed in Winter 2014.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND**

The 2008 Countywide Park Trails Plan identified the need to improve trail signage and to include projects for trail signage and amenities within the Department of Parks' capital work program. In addition, there have been public comments and concerns expressed over time regarding inadequate signage along the Rock Creek Trail. This project was initiated in the Department's capital improvements program and funded from the Trails: Hard Surface Design and Construction PDF. The project includes the following two parts:

- Part 1: Development of a trail signage design manual that will be used as a standard for future hard surface trail signage improvement projects in the Montgomery Parks hard surface trail system. The trail signage manual will feature the Rock Creek Trail signage plans, which will serve as a pilot project and benchmark standard for future hard surface trail signage projects.

- Part 2: Development of signage plans and installation of new signs for the entire fourteen-mile length of the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail in Montgomery County, including signs from adjacent neighborhood trail connectors.

The project was initiated in Fall 2012 and a consultant team led by Toole Design Group, with expertise in graphics and bikeway and trail planning, was hired to do the work. The project began with an all-day workshop on November 7, 2012, where stakeholders and user groups were invited to participate in a brainstorming session. Examples of other trail signage systems were reviewed and compared. Participants included staff from the Montgomery County Department of Transportation, Columbia Association, and park staff stakeholders. Members of the Countywide Trails Working Group and staff from the Prince George’s County Department of Parks and Recreation were also invited. Topics of discussion included sign panel design (size, layout, font, colors), trail logos, families of signs, sign placement, symbol use, physical sign support systems, and kiosk map design.

Over a six month period, alternatives for sign types, fonts, colors and a trail system logo were explored and developed in conjunction with staff from the Public Affairs & Community Partnerships Division of Parks. Fonts for the trail gateway signs utilize the current font from branding initiatives for Montgomery Parks. Draft recommendations were reviewed with the Trails Working Group on April 10, 2013, which includes representatives from trail user groups and park stewardship advocates that are advising the Department on the Countywide Park Trails Plan Amendment, and recommendations were also reviewed with the Park Director’s office on June 4, 2013. Initial review comments were incorporated into the project, and a 50% draft of the sign manual and sign plans for the trail have been prepared. This information was posted on the project website in late August 2013, allowing public comment for the entire month of September. Notices were sent to a wide range of trail user groups and advocates, including the Trails Working Group, the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail, Silver Spring Trails, NIH Bicycle Commuter Club, and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. In addition, temporary notices were posted on the trail at two-mile intervals to invite public comment on the project. Comments on the project that have been collected so far include the following:

Comments	Staff Response
Varied opinions were expressed on the background color of the signs. Public comments favored the use of a green background color for trail gateway and navigation signs, since it is consistent with on road bike signage.	Trail gateway and navigation signs are proposed with a green background and white text. See Attachment exhibits A.2, A.3, A.4, A.5, and A.6.
Ensure that the hierarchy of destinations provided on trail wayfinding signage is meaningful, both on and off the trail (such as listing destinations to arterial roads rather	Will comply. The Trail Signage Manual will also provide guidelines for naming and selecting destinations.

than minor residential streets).	
Provide wayfinding signage directing users to other trails, bikeways, and points of access.	Will comply.
Provide trail centerline striping.	Trail striping guidelines that support wayfinding and general trail safety will be provided in the Trail Signage Manual.
Signage and surface markings need to be coordinated with DOT as the trail approaches road crossings.	Will comply.
Avoid sign proliferation along the trail and ensure that sizes of signs are not too large.	Will comply. The Rock Creek Trail signage plan minimizes the amount of signage where possible.
Mileage markers should be posted at half-mile increments, at a minimum. Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) requested quarter-mile increments, since this would increase chances of locating patrons during time-sensitive emergency situations.	Trail Mileage Marker signs are proposed every half-mile to minimize sign proliferation.
Kiosk maps should include information regarding the accessibility of the trail system.	A full accessibility audit will be conducted at a later date to determine inaccessible areas of the trail, which could be accurately posted on kiosk maps.
In selection of materials, consider how graffiti would be removed on signs and kiosk surfaces.	Will comply.
Etiquette signs need to be provided, such as “stay right and pass left” and “leashed dog” signs.	Basic etiquette signs will be provided. See Attachment A.7 and A.8 for proposed signage. Other etiquette messages will be considered for posting in the trail kiosks.
There were specific requests for vehicular signage at trail / roadway crossings.	Vehicular signage is proposed at trail crossings and will be located in DOT or SHA rights-of-way, as applicable.
Speed limit signs should be added along the trail.	Will consider adding speed limit information on notices posted in the trail kiosks.
Parks should institute an “adopt a mile” program to aid in general trail clean up.	This is an idea that could be considered in the future but will not be implemented with this project.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Hard Surface Trail Signage Manual

Hard surface trails within Montgomery Parks are primarily located in stream valleys and often do not meet established bikeway design standards. The Department of Parks has developed design guidelines for hard surface trails, which balance the protection of natural and cultural resources with recreation and transportation needs. It is sometimes difficult to achieve this balance. Guidelines for park trails draw from different recognized standards, including current recommendations for shared use paths from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities (2012), Americans with Disabilities Act Guidelines, and the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Intersections with public roads must comply with applicable standards from the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA).

The Hard Surface Trail Signage Manual (Manual) recommends a simple uniform sign system consisting primarily of metal reflective signs on square steel posts for ease of maintenance and versatility for mounting signs on two or more sides. The Manual considered several issues, including branding for Montgomery Park Trails, defining a clear “family of signs”, and the use of color on different signs. The Manual proposes green as the background color for gateway and navigation signs. Green signage is consistent with MUTCD for distance, destination, and directional information within and outside the park system and will reduce possible confusion for trail users when transitioning to other County bicycle facilities. However, the signage proposed at trail gateways and major intersections will utilize unique M-NCPPC approved fonts, which will offer a subtle yet distinctive brand for all M-NCPPC hard surface trails.

The following types of signs are proposed. Please reference **Attachment A** for proposed signage exhibits.

- Trail Gateway Signs: Primary Trail Gateway signs are located at major trail entrances, connector trail entrances, trailhead parking areas, or at major road intersections. These signs identify the trail name, operating agency (M-NCPPC), and the allowed modes of use. Secondary Trail Gateway signs mainly identify the trail name and the direction to major destinations. These signs are located on the main trail at the intersection with each local trail connector leading from adjacent residential areas. (See Attachment A.2, A.3, A.4).
- Trail Navigation Signs: located at trail junctures to provide additional means of wayfinding or to provide reassurance to stay on the trail. These signs also provide distances to roadway crossings or supplemental destinations offset from the trail (See Attachment A.5, A.6)
- Trail Etiquette Signs: located along the trail in high use areas to encourage trail users to be mindful and aware of other trail users with varying modes and speed of travel (See Attachment A.7, A.8).

- Trail Warning Signs: located in advance of sharp turns, steep slopes, limited visibility, narrow clearance, flood-prone areas, or other unique conditions requiring extra trail user caution (See Attachment A.8).
- Trail / Roadway Traffic Regulatory Signs: provides guidance to trail users when a specific trail use is prohibited or a specific law may be enforced (See Attachment A.9).
- Trail / Roadway Intersection Signs: provides guidance to trail users and vehicles where a trail crosses a roadway (See Attachment A.9).
- Trail Mileage Markers: located at half-mile (1/2) intervals at a minimum. Intended to provide trail users with distance for exercise purposes as well as to locate trail users during an emergency (See Attachment A.10).

### **Rock Creek Trail Signage Plans**

Trail signage plans have been developed for fourteen miles of trail, located in the Rock Creek Stream Valley Park, extending from Lake Needwood in Rock Creek Regional Park south to the District of Columbia line. The proposed signs details and locations have been documented in a “notebook”, which is referenced to plan locations that have been geo-located using GPS equipment. Each page of the signage plans “notebook” is dedicated to each signage assembly proposed along the entire 14-miles of trail, including various trail connectors leading to and from adjacent residential and commercial areas. Overall, there are approximately 200 sign assembly locations. The number of individual signs proposed at each sign assembly location varies greatly. Signs are generally installed back-to-back, and in some cases facing three directions. In addition to the approximately 200 sign assemblies located along the main trail and connectors, there are about 22 locations where the trail crosses a roadway, ranging from minor park roads to major intersections like East-West Highway. In general there are at least six (6) signage assemblies located at each road crossing, per DOT or SHA guidelines.

### **NEXT STEPS**

This project will set future sign standards for the hard surface trail system. The project is expected to be completed with new signage installed in Winter 2014. Future trail signage projects will be planned in the capital improvements program.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Proposed Signage Exhibits

**ATTACHMENT A:**  
Proposed Signage Exhibits





Trail Gateway Sign: Primary



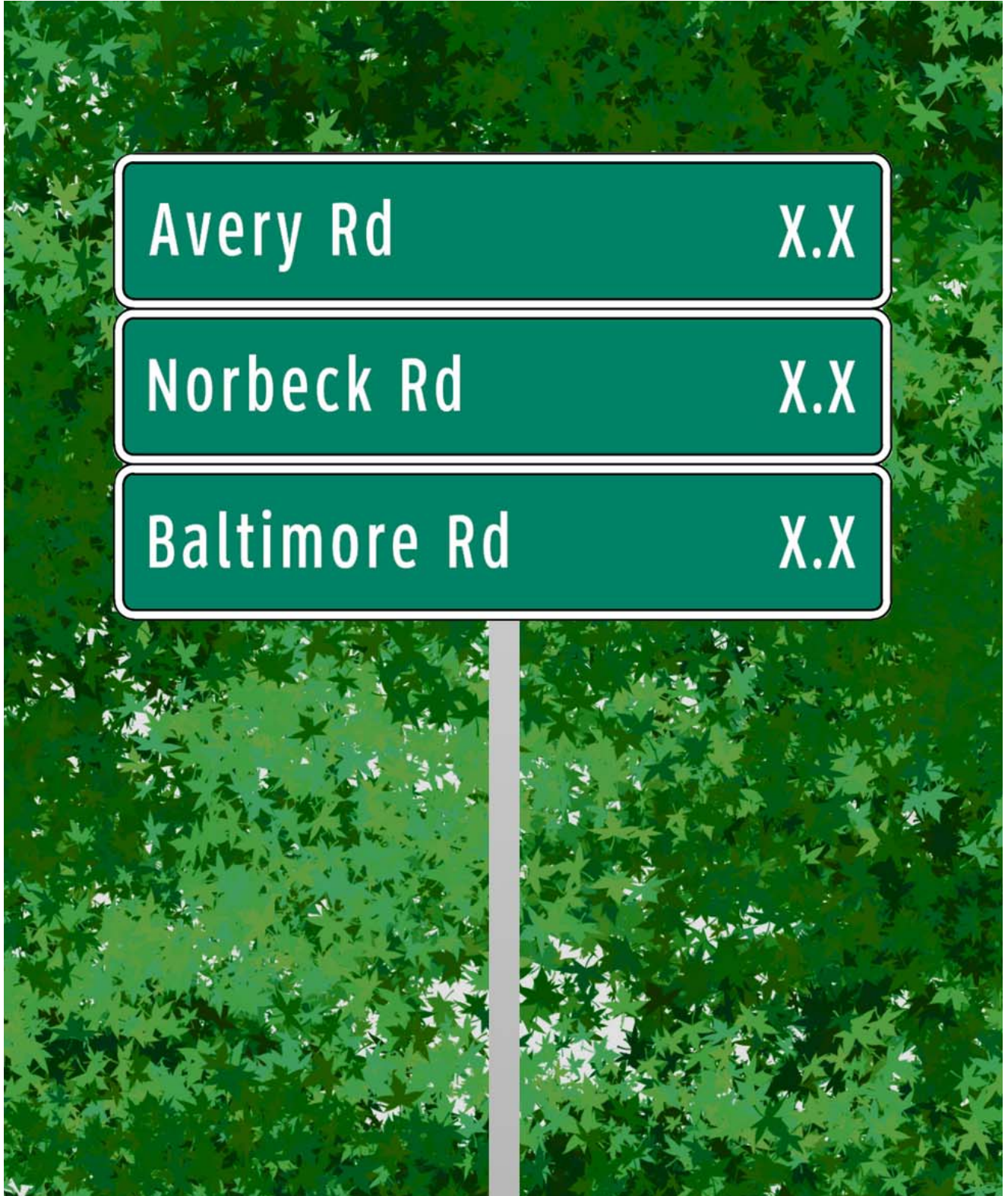
Trail Gateway Sign: Primary  
(Long Trail Name)





Trail Gateway Sign: Secondary





Trail Navigation Sign: Roadway Intersections





Trail Navigation Sign: Supplemental Destinations

**KEEP RIGHT**

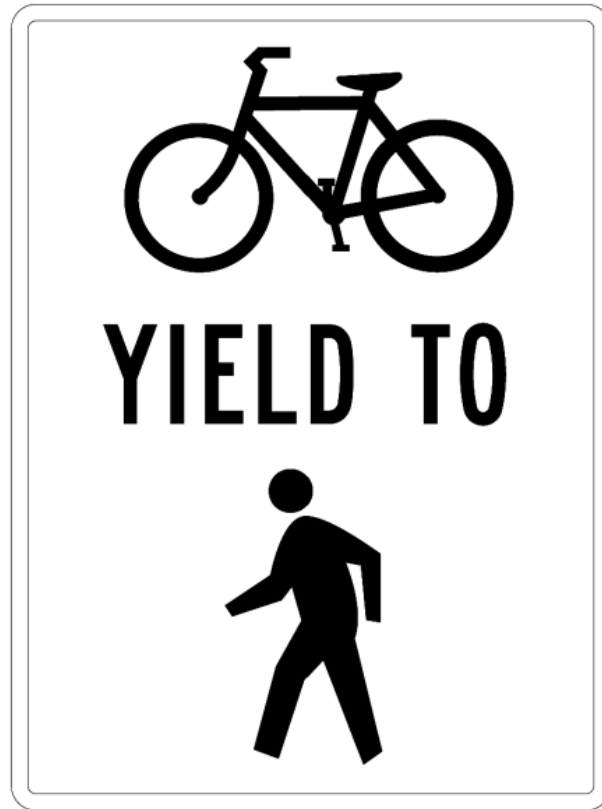


**PASS LEFT**

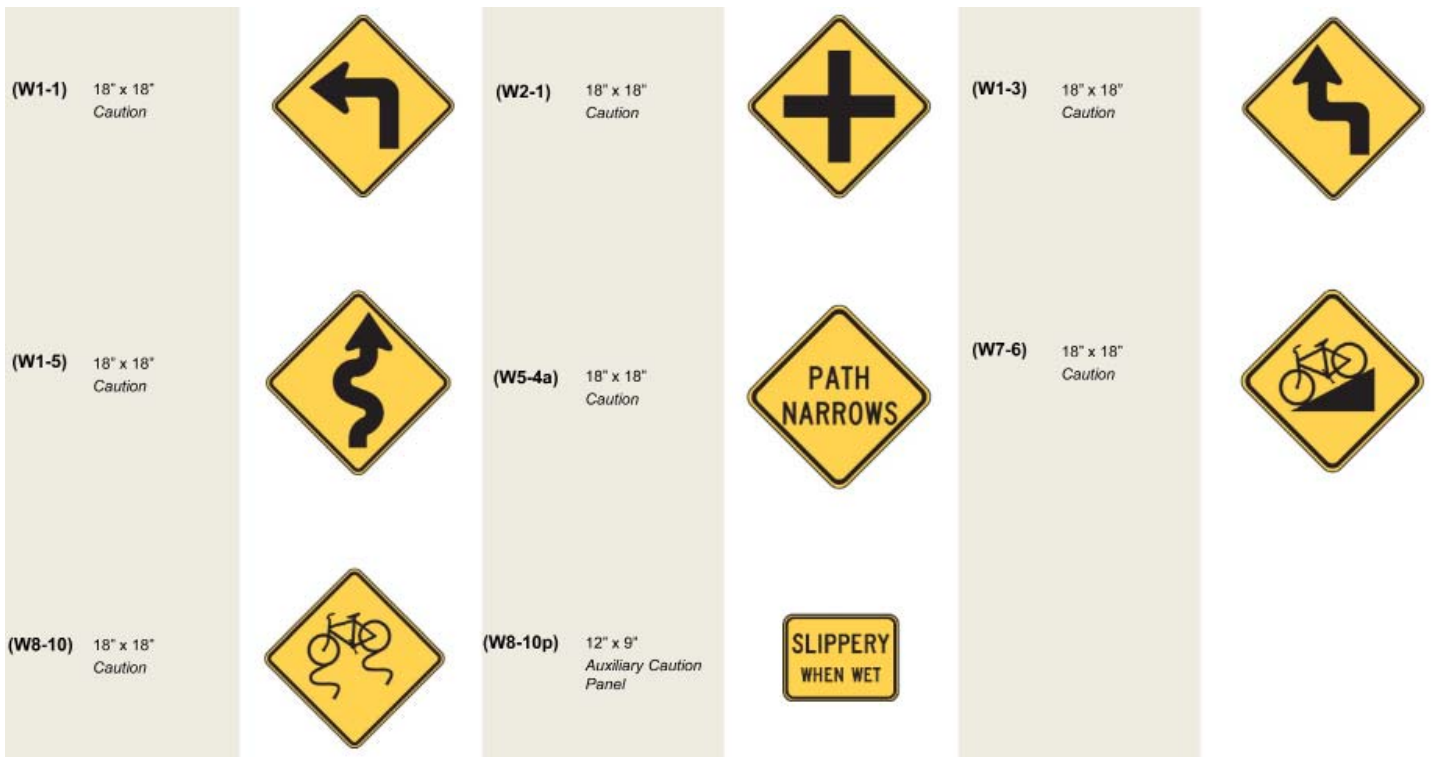
**GIVE WARNING**



**WHEN PASSING**

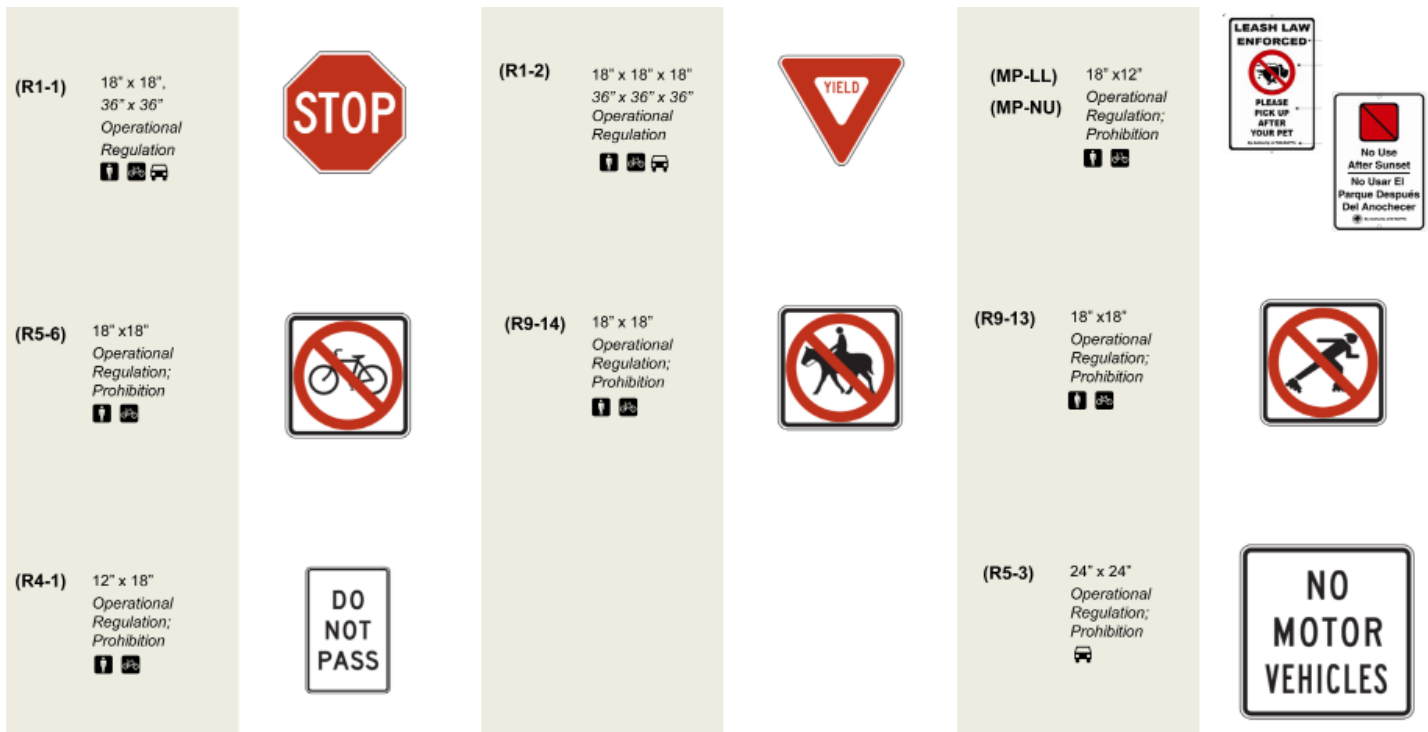


Trail Etiquette Sign

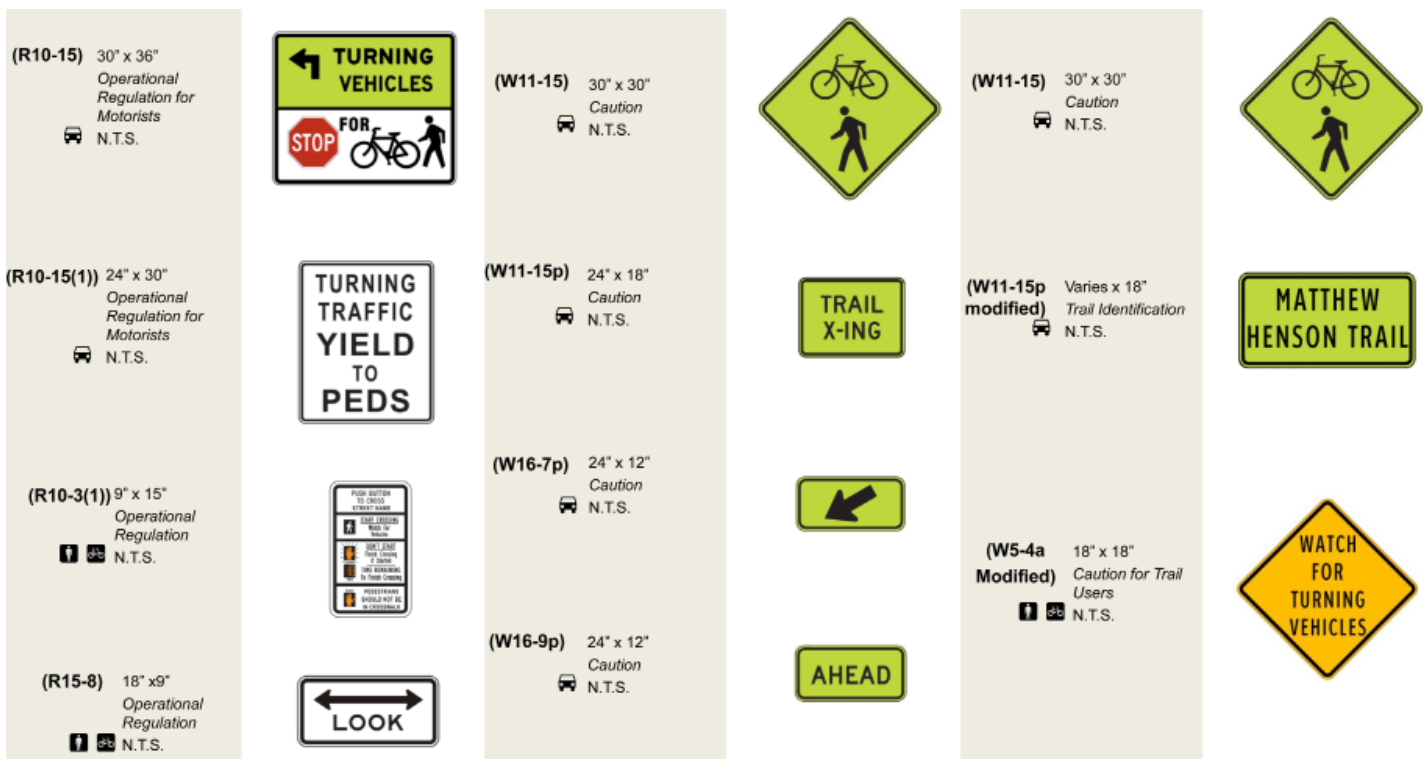


Trail Warning Signs

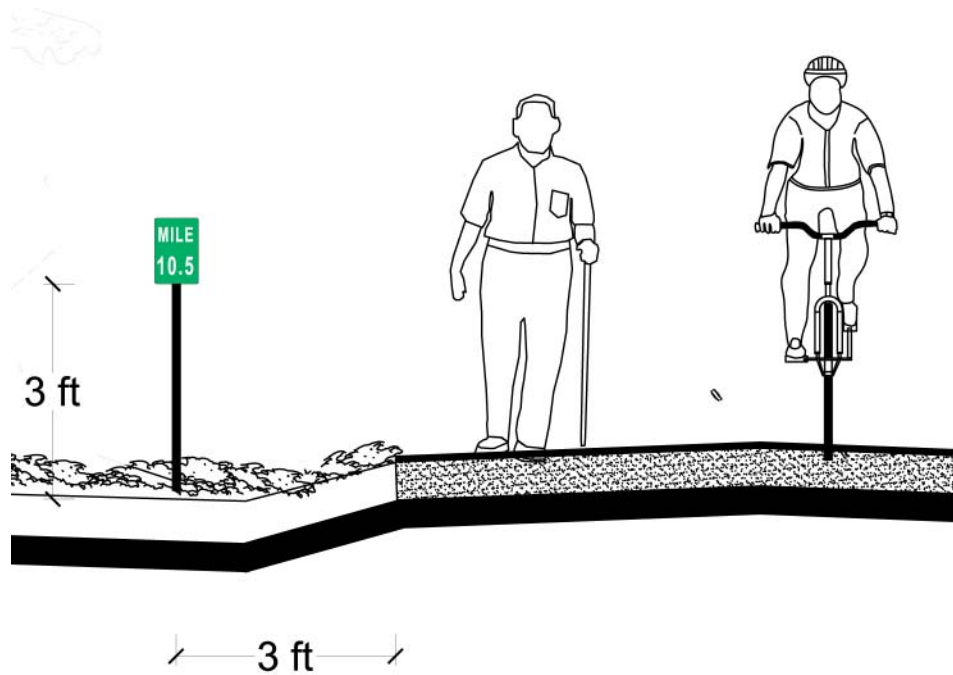
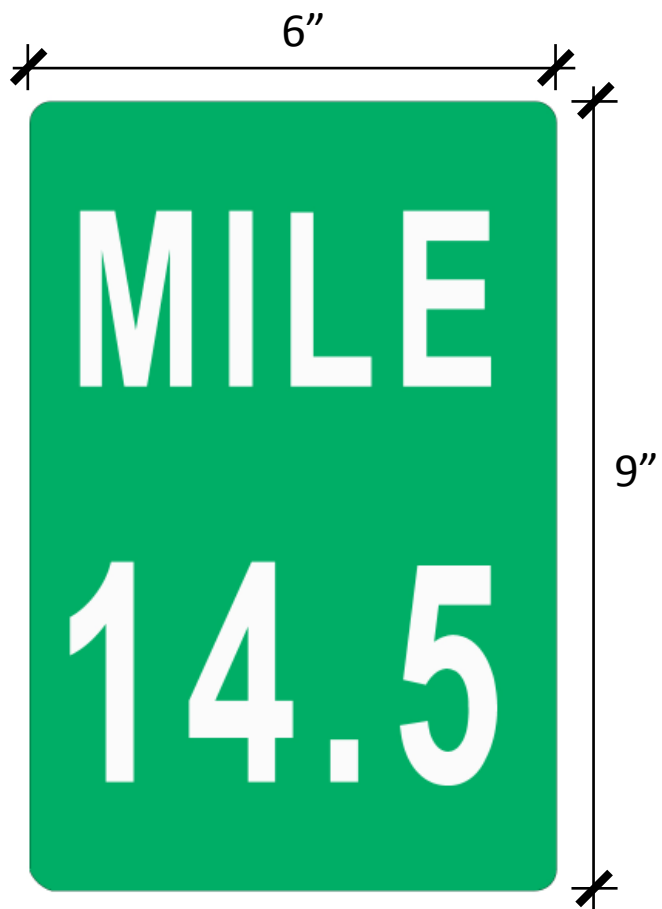




## Trail / Roadway Traffic Regulatory Signs



## Trail / Roadway Intersection Signs



Trail Mileage Markers