

GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING

TEMPORARY TRAFFIC BREAKS

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The intent of this document is to provide guidance on the design and implementation of temporary traffic breaks, including rolling slowdowns, short-term stoppages, and traffic diversions at interchanges.

This document consolidates and expands information formerly contained within prior versions of the Interstate Highways Congestion Policy (IHCP), which focused primarily on rolling slowdowns. With the 2026 IHCP, that material has been moved into this stand-alone guidance document.

The guidance will be updated in the future to further improve instruction for designers—particularly in selecting appropriate strategies and planning the temporary traffic control elements needed to perform them safely. Future updates will also enhance guidance for personnel implementing temporary traffic breaks in the field to ensure safe, consistent execution.

This guidance is intended for consultants, contractors, permittees, INDOT staff, and any entity responsible for planning, proposing, or executing temporary traffic breaks.

SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

Nothing in this guidance document supersedes the governing policies, standards, regulations, or FHWA requirements that apply to work zones. In any instance of conflict, those governing requirements prevail. This document provides procedural expectations only; it does not modify policy or create new authority.

Nothing in this guidance document supersedes governing policies, standards, regulations, or FHWA requirements that apply to interstate work zones. If any conflict arises, those governing requirements prevail.

This document provides procedural expectations only; it does not modify policy or create new authority.

TEMPORARY TRAFFIC BREAKS

Temporary traffic breaks are short duration temporary traffic control (TTC) operations that fully clear all lanes in one direction of travel—or, when necessary, the entire roadway—to create a protected window for work activities on, above, or immediately adjacent to interstate or other high speed facilities. These operations momentarily remove live traffic from the affected direction, providing a level of worker protection that cannot be achieved through standard lane restrictions, shoulder work, or mobile operations.

Temporary traffic breaks are used only when work cannot be performed safely adjacent to live traffic due to operational or safety constraints. They are full direction impacts, meaning every lane in the bound is controlled, slowed, or stopped for a brief period to:

- Create a short window of slowed or stopped traffic upstream of the work
- Provide workers full access to the roadway
- Minimize exposure to traffic hazards
- Complete tasks that cannot be performed safely in the presence of moving traffic

Temporary traffic breaks are distinct from other TTC strategies because they clear all lanes in a direction, unlike lane restrictions (which keep at least one lane open), shoulder or median work (performed adjacent to flowing traffic), or mobile operations (continuous, slow moving activities with intermittent brief stops that do not clear an entire direction of travel).

CONDITIONS WARRANTING A TEMPORARY TRAFFIC BREAK

Temporary traffic breaks are implemented when work activities require short-duration, full-direction clearance. Typical conditions include:

- Structural and Overhead Work
 - Bridge beam placement and other structural lifts
 - Overhead sign structure installation
 - Overhead utility pulls requiring uninterrupted aerial clearance
 - Temporary lifts, gantry installation, or horizontal transfers across all lanes
- Maintenance or Emergency Work Requiring Full-Direction Clearance
 - Debris removal that cannot be performed adjacent to live traffic
 - Patching operations requiring full-width access for equipment or crew safety
 - Removal of disabled or stalled vehicles that cannot be retrieved safely under traffic
- Temporary Traffic Control Operations
 - MOT-for-MOT activities and TTC phase changes when TTC reconfiguration cannot safely occur under live traffic
 - Repositioning temporary barrier, TMAs, or TTC devices requiring occupancy of multiple lanes

These examples reflect situations in which adjacent-lane operations, mobile operations, or single-lane closures are insufficient to maintain worker and road-user safety.

TEMPORARY TRAFFIC BREAK STRATEGIES

Temporary traffic breaks include several TTC strategies:

- Rolling Slowdowns (RSDs) – coordinated pacing operations using pilot/chase vehicles to gradually slow all lanes in one direction until traffic is temporarily cleared upstream of the work area.
- Short-Term Stoppages (STSSs) – brief, stationary full-direction stops where all lanes in one bound, typically for overhead, structural, or safety-critical work.
- Diversions – temporary rerouting of an entire direction to an alternate path (e.g., system interchange ramps) for short-duration work needs.

Selection of a traffic break strategy should consider operational constraints, geometric conditions, traffic volumes, interchange spacing, sight distance, required clear zone movement, expected queue behavior, available resources, coordination needs, and the specific characteristics of the work activity. Advance warning is essential for any temporary traffic break, regardless of strategy.

Rolling Slowdowns involve multiple coordinated vehicles and require careful timing and communication, making them operationally complex in some contexts. They may be appropriate when several short-duration breaks are needed or when the work requires a moving clear zone. Short Term Stoppages and Diversions can be effective alternatives, particularly when only one or a small number of breaks are required or when site conditions better support a stationary or rerouted operation.

COORDINATION AND OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

These strategies are used only when necessary and must be coordinated with appropriate notifications, approvals, TTC plans, and (when required) FHWA concurrence. These strategies when implemented correctly, can improve operational safety while reducing the need for long-duration lane closures. These strategies can be applied widely across construction, maintenance, utility, and emergency activities. These operations require careful design, coordination, and execution to ensure worker and road-user safety and minimize operational impacts.

Because temporary traffic breaks remove all traffic from a direction, they require elevated coordination and communication, including:

- Notification to and coordination with the Traffic Management Center (TMC)
- Coordination with law enforcement supporting the operation
- Compliance with TTC plans, contract provisions, and all applicable INDOT and FHWA requirements
- Advance notification to the District and affected stakeholders as required

INTERSTATES, THE 20 MINUTE THRESHOLD AND FHWA INVOLVEMENT

For interstate applications, the requirements of the Interstate Highways Congestion Policy (IHCP) apply. For more information, see the Policy, its Appendices, and guidance on submitting an IHCP Notification of Restriction or a Policy Exception.

FHWA oversight applies to specific interstate restrictions, including full interstate closures or full directional closures, interstate-to-interstate ramp closures, and interstate interchange diversions or detours. These types of restrictions require federal concurrence or approval because they fundamentally alter interstate operations.

Temporary traffic breaks differ in that they are short-duration, full-direction interruptions. When a temporary traffic break clears all lanes in one direction for 20 minutes or less, FHWA approval is not required. **The 20-minute threshold reflects the total traffic impact, not the amount of work time available, which is the work window.** Therefore, the usable work window is always shorter than 20 minutes. The window begins only after traffic has been fully cleared, which occurs some time after the break is initiated.

If a temporary traffic break results in traffic being held, paced, or diverted for more than 20 minutes, it is no longer considered a short-duration traffic break. It becomes a full closure, triggering FHWA involvement. This threshold serves as FHWA's practical dividing line between short-duration traffic breaks that INDOT may implement independently and full closures that require federal review and concurrence.

ROLLING SLOWDOWN (RSD)

A Rolling Slowdown (RSD) is a type of Temporary Traffic Break in which pilot vehicles pace and temporarily slow all lanes in one direction of travel to create a short duration, full direction clear zone upstream of a work area. RSDs are used only when the work cannot be safely performed adjacent to live traffic and where a moving TTC operation is the most effective way to momentarily remove traffic from the roadway.

RSDs provide a controlled, mobile method of clearing traffic for a period generally not to exceed 20 minutes.

KEY OPERATING PRINCIPLES

An RSD must:

- Control every lane and shoulders in one direction of travel using pilot vehicles operating side-by-side.
- Use a chase vehicle to determine the beginning of the work window.
- Maintain a minimum pilot-vehicle speed of 20 MPH.
- Begin speed reduction at or before Distance A (see Table 1), which is the required location upstream of the work for the selected posted speed and desired clear time.
- Ensure any queued traffic is allowed to dissipate before initiating a subsequent RSD (a minimum of 20 minutes or until free-flowing, whichever is longer).

The 20-minute threshold measures total traffic impact, not work time. Because the slowdown begins before the work area is cleared, the actual work window is always shorter than 20 minutes.

ADVANCE WARNING FOR AN RSD

Standard TTC advance warning must be deployed upstream of the slowdown, including:

- “ROAD WORK AHEAD” Sign
⇅ Distance: 1,500 feet
- “PILOT CARS AHEAD” Sign
⇅ Distance: 1,000 feet
- “WATCH FOR STOPPED TRAFFIC” Sign. An optional supplemental plaque such as “OVERHEAD SIGN INSTALLATION”, “OVERHEAD BEAM INSTALLATION”, or “OVERHEAD WIRE INSTALLATION” may be used to reflect the work activity.
⇅ Distance: 2,640 feet + Distance A (see Table 1)
- Work Area

Portable changeable messages signs (PCMS) should be placed ahead of the upstream (preceding) exit to alert drivers about the slowdown at a point where the decision to detour can be made and the exit maneuver completed safely. The sign should be activated when the pilot vehicles are ready to enter the road and continue until the traffic speeds are close to normal. A typical

message sequence would begin with “ROLLING SLOWDOWN AHEAD” for the first phase and display the times for the RSDs on the second phase. If the signs are in place more than 24 hours before the start of RSDs they shall display the date the RSDs are scheduled to begin in place of the word “AHEAD” on the first phase and the times they will occur in the second phase.

Other temporary traffic control devices may be needed due to field conditions such as intersecting interstate highways within the area affected by the RSD.

VEHICLE ROLES AND POSITIONING

A standard RSD uses:

- One pilot vehicle per open lane and shoulder traveling side-by-side.
- A chase vehicle to mark the beginning of the work window.
- Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) where required or advantageous (e.g., closing ramps, shoulder positioning, queue protection).

Law enforcement involvement is recognized as best practice and aligns with typical INDOT operations.

Pilot vehicles (except for law enforcement vehicles) shall be equipped with:

- High-intensity rotating, flashing, oscillating, or strobe warning lights with 360o visibility, and
- Mounted on the rear of the pilot vehicle, either;
 - An arrow panel in caution mode and a sign with the legend, “PILOT CAR FOLLOW ME”, or
 - A truck mounted changeable message sign with the messages “PILOT VEHICLE” for one phase and “FOLLOW ME” for the other phase.

Advance Warning vehicles may be used to mitigate the queue by alerting drivers to the slowed traffic ahead by positioning it approximately 1/2 mile behind the anticipated queue. A PCMS should be used on this vehicle. This vehicle should be repositioned or another Advance Warning vehicle placed further back if the queue reaches the expected length and continues to grow. The Advance Warning vehicle may also be a marked law enforcement vehicle with its lights activated.

Pilot vehicles and Advance Warning vehicles should be fitted with a truck- or trailer-mounted attenuator (TMA).

PROCEDURE FOR AN RSD

The RSD will proceed as follows:

1. Initial Setup

Starting at a point that will allow them to achieve the posted speed limit by the time they are Distance A (see Table 1) from the work area, the chase vehicle, followed by the pilot vehicles, pulls off the shoulder onto the first lane and accelerates to the posted or

operating speed (whichever is lower.) All warning lights should be activated when the vehicles start moving if they are not already activated. Alternatively, the vehicles may enter the roadway from the preceding entrance ramp if they will be able to meet the required speed before they reach the point at Distance A from the work area.

Any law enforcement vehicles used in conjunction with the pilot vehicles should remain on the shoulder of the roadway, stay behind the backup, or be used to close the entrance ramps. The law enforcement vehicle's flashing red and blue lights should be activated for the duration of the queuing (See Figure 1).

Entering traffic shall be stopped at every entrance ramp until the pilot vehicles pass the end of the ramp.

2. Pilot and chase vehicles accelerate to posted speed

Pilot vehicles and the chase vehicle enter from the shoulder or ramp and accelerate to posted speed before reaching Distance A.

One pilot vehicle per open lane and a single chase vehicle shall be used. If either shoulder is greater than or equal to 8 ft wide, another pilot vehicle (preferably a law enforcement vehicle) should be used on that shoulder. Law Enforcement vehicles used for pilot or Advance Warning vehicles should have standard red and blue lights placed as specified by the department supplying the vehicle.

Once they have reached the posted speed limit and are 1000 feet past the "WATCH FOR STOPPED TRAFFIC" sign, the pilot vehicles shall activate their PCMS (if so equipped), then move into their assigned lane, and then proceed to line up next to each other.

3. Formation and pacing

Pilot vehicles form a side-by-side line and gradually reduce speed to approximately 20 MPH starting at Distance A.

At a point that is Distance A ahead of the work area, the pilot vehicles begin to slowdown gradually, over a distance of up to 1 mile, to the designated speed of 20 MPH. For other lesser speeds of 10 and 15 MPH, these distances will change. The pilot vehicle should not stop unless unforeseeable delays prevent the completion of the work in the planned clear time.

4. Work window begins

Once the chase vehicle passes the work area, the roadway ahead is clear, and the work window starts.

The chase vehicle follows the last free moving vehicles and work may begin once the chase vehicle passes the work site. If the free moving traffic in front of the chase vehicle is travelling less than the posted speed limit, then the operation should be suspended and reset after the reason for the slowed traffic has been resolved, or the Pilot Vehicles may reduce their speed slightly to permit the desired clear time.

5. Work window ends

Traffic is released once pilot vehicles pass the work area and accelerate back to normal speeds.

6. Queue dissipation

No subsequent slowdown may begin until queued traffic dissipates and a minimum of 20 minutes has passed. If more than one RSD is required the next slowdown shall not begin until all of the traffic slowed down in the prior RSD has passed the beginning of the slowdown or twenty minutes, whichever is longer.

All RSD vehicles must be in their designated starting position prior to beginning the next slowdown.

PLAN REQUIREMENTS

A Rolling Slowdown must be depicted in the project's TTC plan or TMP with sufficient detail to demonstrate:

- Required distances (including Distance A)
- Vehicle staging and sequence
- Ramp control needs
- Queue mitigation measures
- PCMS and advance-warning placement

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

For interstate applications, the requirements of the Interstate Highways Congestion Policy (IHCP) apply. For more information, see the Policy, its Appendices, and guidance on submitting an IHCP Notification of Restriction or a Policy Exception.

Good communication is essential among all traffic control vehicles, flaggers, the chase vehicle and the job site. A competent person at the job site should be assigned to keep in contact with the TMC, law enforcement, the chase vehicle, pilot vehicles, and the work crew for adjustments. The foreman of the crew performing the RSD will have a phone number for at least one 24 hour towing company prior to the start of the RSDs if towing is not included in the TMP for the project.

Alternatives to RSDs are often needed where tight interchange spacing restricts the ability to perform a standard RSD. Any proposed RSD (or approved alternate) shall be reported to the following entities at least 24 hours prior to proceeding: District Public Information Officer, TMC Dispatch Center of jurisdiction, Local ISP post, and Toll Road if applicable.

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Distance A

Speed of Pilot Vehicle ↓	20 Minute Clear Time					
	Posted Speed Limit					
	45 MPH	50 MPH	55 MPH	60 MPH	65 MPH	70 MPH
10 MPH	5.2 Miles	5.0 Miles	5.0 Miles	4.9 Miles	4.9 Miles	4.8 Miles
15 MPH	8.3 Miles	8.0 Miles	7.7 Miles	7.5 Miles	7.4 Miles	7.2 Miles
20 MPH	12.7 Miles	11.9 Miles	11.3 Miles	10.8 Miles	10.4 Miles	10.2 Miles

Speed of Pilot Vehicle ↓	15 Minute Clear Time					
	Posted Speed Limit					
	45 MPH	50 MPH	55 MPH	60 MPH	65 MPH	70 MPH
10 MPH	4.1 Miles	4.0 Miles	4.0 Miles	3.9 Miles	3.9 Miles	3.8 Miles
15 MPH	6.4 Miles	6.2 Miles	6.0 Miles	5.8 Miles	5.7 Miles	5.6 Miles
20 MPH	9.7 Miles	9.1 Miles	8.6 Miles	8.3 Miles	8.0 Miles	7.8 Miles

Speed of Pilot Vehicle ↓	10 Minute Clear Time					
	Posted Speed Limit					
	45 MPH	50 MPH	55 MPH	60 MPH	65 MPH	70 MPH
10 MPH	3.0 Miles	3.0 Miles	2.9 Miles	2.9 Miles	2.9 Miles	2.9 Miles
15 MPH	4.5 Miles	4.4 Miles	4.3 Miles	4.2 Miles	4.1 Miles	4.1 Miles
20 MPH	6.7 Miles	6.3 Miles	6.0 Miles	5.8 Miles	5.6 Miles	5.5 Miles

Speed of Pilot Vehicle ↓	5 Minute Clear Time					
	Posted Speed Limit					
	45 MPH	50 MPH	55 MPH	60 MPH	65 MPH	70 MPH
10 MPH	1.9 Miles	1.9 Miles	1.9 Miles	1.9 Miles	1.9 Miles	1.9 Miles
15 MPH	2.7 Miles	2.6 Miles	2.6 Miles	2.5 Miles	2.5 Miles	2.5 Miles
20 MPH	3.7 Miles	3.5 Miles	3.4 Miles	3.3 Miles	3.2 Miles	3.2 Miles

Table 1. Minimum Distance A

Distance A is the minimum distance from the work area to where Pilot Vehicles begin to reduce speed to the designated speed for a given posted speed limit. Distances vary with Pilot Vehicle speed.

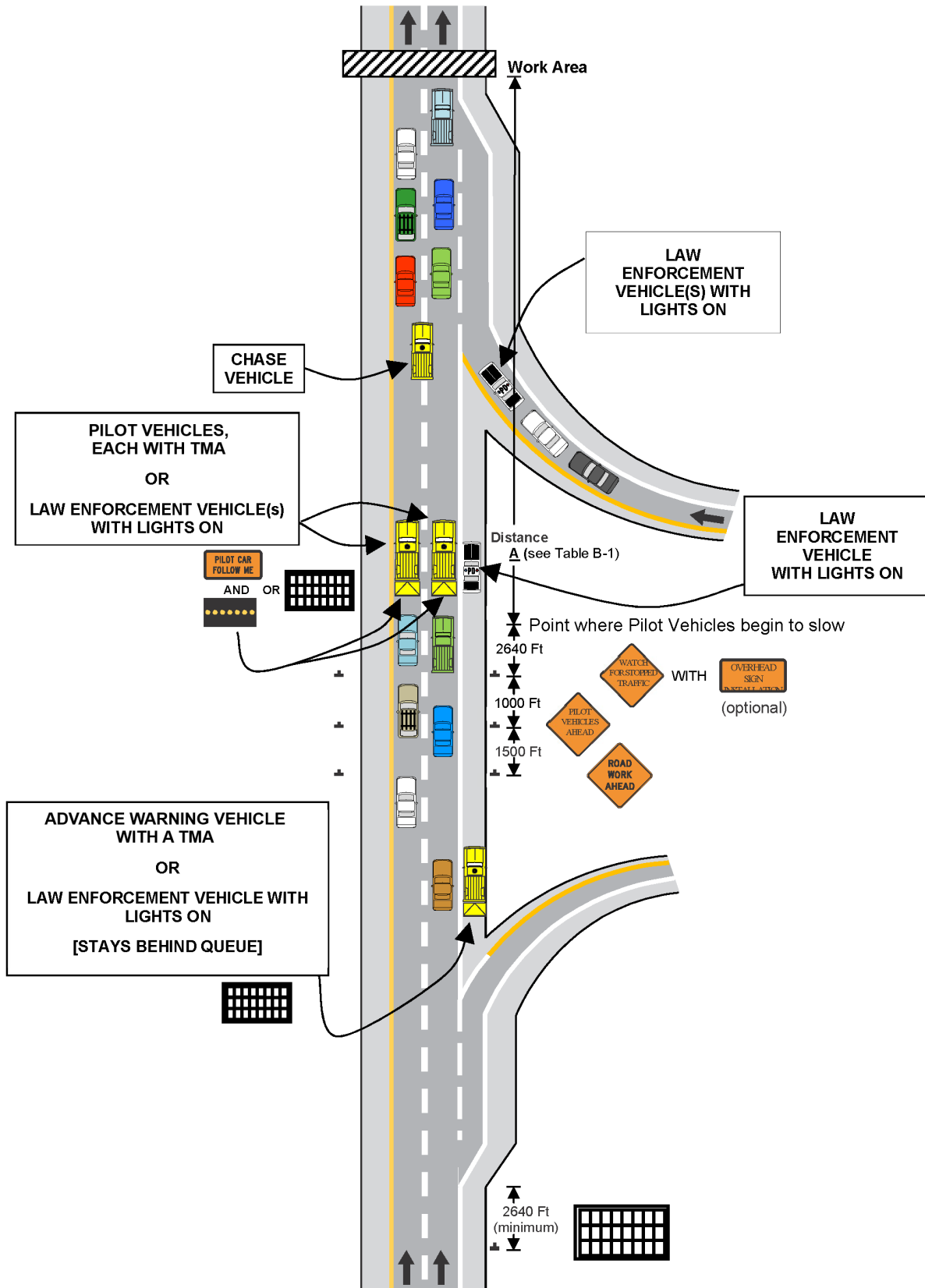


Figure 1. Rolling Slowdown

FUTURE GUIDANCE FORTHCOMING

Guidance for additional strategies to be added.