



Infrastructure Management Services

THE RIGHT WAY TO MANAGE RIGHT-OF-WAY

If you are involved with public works management, chances are you are one of the few that truly understand the time, effort, and money that goes into maintaining right-of-way assets throughout your city. When drivers pull their car up to a traffic signal, or merge into a turn lane marked by a painted pavement surface, it is easy for them to take for granted the vital assets that help manage the flow of thousands of vehicles each day. It is only when these assets are damaged or missing that their value is truly recognized.

Government accountability standards such as GASB 34 require municipalities to act as good stewards in maintaining public assets. This includes any right-of-way asset owned by the city. For this reason the FHA has released several guides such as this one to lead local governments through the rigorous process of installing and documenting all of the city-owned right-of-way assets.



THE RIGHT WAY TO MANAGE RIGHT-OF-WAY

In the pavement management industry, right-of-way assets are the visual cues along a roadway that communicate important information to drivers. This means street signs, traffic lights, pavement markings, but can also include curbsides and drainage assets. All of these pieces are integral to facilitating a safe and efficient flow of traffic.

In addition to the primary goal of improving public safety, local governments may also be subject to regulatory statutes such as GASB 34 that require municipalities to act as good stewards in maintaining these assets. Some states even issue guidelines on proper street sign maintenance and “best practices”. The Minnesota Department of Transportation, for example, has

created a thorough overview of the expectations, processes, and literature in reference to their right-of-way assets. Guides such as this one are used by city planners and public works teams throughout the country to plan and maintain their traffic sign inventories.

Wherever there are government regulations, there are bound to be lawyers eagerly awaiting an opportunity to pounce on a municipal government for a failure to fully comply with them. A simple Google search for “missing street sign” will return a litany of local lawyers who actively seek civil damages for their clients in these specific cases; yet another reason for local governments to keep track of their assets and expedite repairs.

RIGHT-OF-WAY ASSET DATABASE

In order to execute on their responsibility as a steward of their assets, municipalities must determine where the assets are and how many assets they maintain. The first step to organizing this information is performing a right-of-way asset survey. This can be done in a variety of ways, but the end result is similar; an organized database of signs, signals, markings, and more is compiled together. The assets should then be organized using GIS information and plotted to a map of the city.

A city can track everything they are required to maintain, and properly document repairs with a GIS integrated asset database. Information is entered into the record and proper measures are taken to fix the issue as soon as a call is received and before a missing stop sign or failing traffic light can lead to an injury. Demonstrating the ability to track asset repairs may also be important for avoiding potential legal concerns associated with the upkeep of city owned assets.

LONG-TERM ACCOUNTABILITY

There are four goals in maintaining a right-of-way asset database for your city: Convenience, Accountability, Public Safety, and Cost Savings.

CONVENIENCE

The process of managing thousands of assets can be daunting, so organization is key. When a city has a properly organized asset database it becomes a trivial task to record complaints and issue repairs in a timely manner. This simplifies the tasks of city employees that are responsible for this type of documentation, eliminating waste and errors associated with disorganization.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Cities must remain accountable to their asset stewardship responsibilities. Whether the goal is avoiding a lawsuit or satisfying the requests of city board members, a properly maintained asset database is a strong indicator of a responsibly run local public works administration.

PUBLIC SAFETY

This is arguably the most important responsibility of a local government. When a stop sign has been damaged, vandalized, or stolen it is only a matter of time before an accident ensues. Maintaining an organized database of this type of right-of-way asset allows an administration to act quickly when reports of damaged or missing assets come in. Timely repairs may save lives.

COST SAVINGS

Local governments spend hundreds of thousands of dollars maintaining vast networks of right-of-way assets. Only when right-of-way information is collected and organized into a proper database can decisions be made on the possible removal of unnecessary or otherwise ineffective assets. These assets may include obstructed warning signs, or even overabundant Stop signs at low volume intersections. Municipalities can save thousands of dollars by reigning in some of the unnecessary street signage that tends to accumulate over time.

SIGNAGE TIPS

Check the retroreflectivity of right-of-way signage throughout the network.

"All Regulatory, Warning and Guide signs and object markers are required to be retroreflective or illuminated to show the same shape and similar color by both day and night."

(Best Practices Handbook, 2014)

A reflectometer is used to measure the retroreflectivity of a Minnesota stop sign.



Follow FHWA guidelines for installing street signs.

Proper installation of street signage may assist in preventing damage or theft of a sign. The average lifespan of a street sign is between 15-25 years. Proper installation may extend this timeframe.

A common aluminum sign backing.



Remove redundant or ineffective signs.

The Minnesota Best Practices Handbook provides suggestions for signs that can potentially be removed. Keep in mind that each sign removal should be handled on a case by case basis.

(Best Practices Handbook, 2014)

- Speed Limit signs that merely list the statutory limit are not necessary.



- STOP and YIELD signs at low volume intersections often fail to function as safety devices.



- Signs that provide no obvious law enforcement or safety function are ignored by drivers.



- Static signs that warn drivers of hazardous conditions that are rarely encountered are often ignored. I.E., "Beware of falling rocks"



- Advanced Curve Warnings have been found to only be effective on curves with radii between 1,000 and 1,800 feet. In curves with a larger radius there has been no observed safety effect.



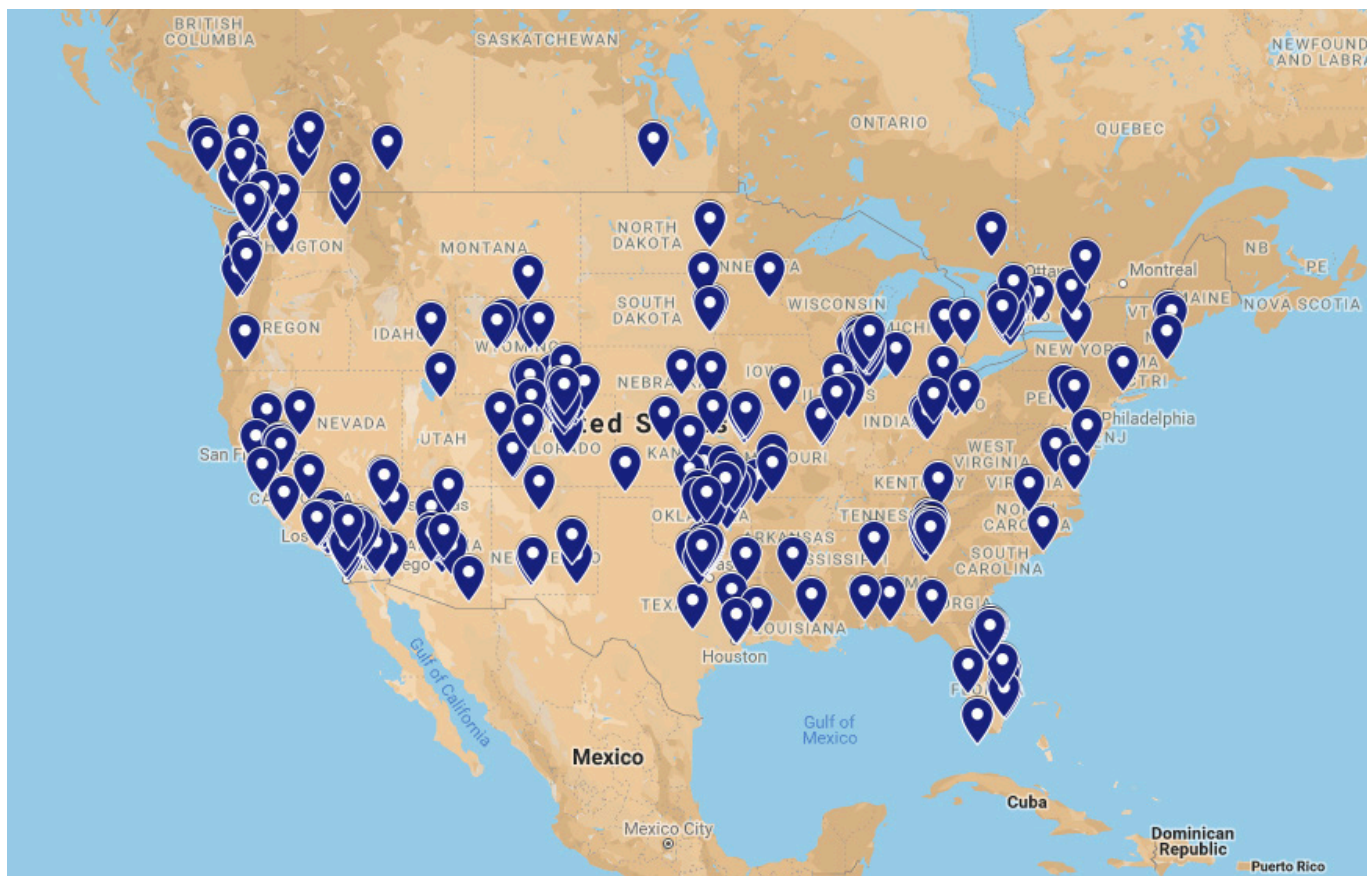


If a sign is not important enough to trim the vegetation obscuring it, the sign could be a candidate for removal.

Although we may take street signs and other right-of-way assets for granted, they are a valuable resource that improves public safety and reduces traffic congestion in our cities. By eliminating redundancies and ineffective right-of-way measures, a municipality can save thousands of dollars. Through the proper oversight and management of a right-of-way asset database, a city can expedite repairs and improve public safety and accountability.

If you are part of a team tasked with managing thousands of right-of-way assets the value of an organized asset database is not lost on you. Take the leap towards improving public safety and accountability in your city by preparing a GIS integrated database of all right-of-way assets. Just as drivers look to the street signs, city managers can look to the asset database to ensure they are headed in the right direction.

WHERE WE OPERATE



Give IMS a call at **480-839-4347**
or visit our website at **www.imsanalysis.com**