

CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

GENERAL ORDER 100.44

REVISED JANUARY 2021

MEDIAN BARRIER OPENINGS

1. POLICY. Highway median barrier openings will be provided by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) upon request at locations identified as essential for departmental operations.

2. GENERAL.

a. The following guidelines have been developed by Caltrans for the selection of median barrier openings¹:

(1) Except for emergency passageways in median barriers, median openings are not allowed on freeways. The use of passageways should be kept to a minimum and carefully located to provide adequate stopping sight distance to and from the opening along the freeway. Emergency passageways may be appropriate for highway patrol vehicles and other emergency service vehicles such as tow trucks, ambulances, firefighting apparatus, and maintenance equipment.

(2) The need for barrier openings/emergency passageways and their locations shall be established by the Caltrans District Traffic Safety Engineer in cooperation with the local California Highway Patrol Area office.

b. Where emergency openings are provided, they are to be designed based on the following considerations:

(1) Types of Vehicles. Emergency passageways are designed for motorcycles or for motor vehicles. Openings for motorcycles are 6 to 8 feet long, and openings for motor vehicles are 12 to 16 feet long.

(2) Types of Passageways. Permanent openings and temporary openings with removable sections of barrier are the two types of emergency passageways used. Emergency passageways may be either temporary, removable sections of barrier or permanent openings where the barrier ends

¹ March 2019, Caltrans Traffic Safety Systems Guidance <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/safety-programs/safety-devices>

are offset away from approaching traffic. All temporary openings are to be closed immediately after use.

(3) Spacing of Passageways. Access to the opposite side of the freeway may be provided by a combination of interchange ramps and emergency passageways. Access openings shall not be placed at less than three-mile intervals.

(4) Median Widths. The median needs to be wide enough to accommodate turning vehicles safely and contain the barrier with any necessary tapers. Therefore, motorcycle emergency passageways are typically not provided where the median is less than 22 feet wide, and motor vehicle emergency passageways are typically not provided where the median is 32 feet or less in width, unless there are unusual circumstances.

c. Glare Screens. Glare screens are designed to screen out the headlight glare of opposing traffic.

(1) Glare screens on new or existing concrete median barriers may be considered where the median is 22 feet or less in width.

(2) The Caltrans standard concrete barrier that is 56 inches tall can function as a glare screen where medians are narrow and headlight glare is an issue. Engineering evaluations should consider glare due to the combined effects of grades, horizontal alignment, traffic volumes, as well as any public complaints. Highway lighting may also be considered to reduce the effects of headlight glare.

(3) Glare screens are not typically installed in medians wider than 22 feet.

3. PROCEDURES.

a. When an Area commander identifies a vital need for an emergency passageway which is consistent with Caltrans' criteria, the commander shall submit a proposal and justification to the appropriate Division.

b. Upon Division approval, the Area commander may submit a formal request to the appropriate Caltrans District Director.

c. The Area commander shall keep Division informed of the progress and final completion date.

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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