

3 July 2026

Emilia Sharp
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REF: OIA-22511

Dear Emilia

Request made under the Official Information Act 1982

Thank you for your email of 10 June 2026 requesting information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

You asked about situations where a red disc is displayed while a red arrow may be unlit. By way of context, this signal behaviour is permitted under the Land Transport Rule: Traffic Control Devices 2004 (Traffic Control Devices Rule). The Traffic Control Devices Rule sets out the legal requirements for traffic signal displays but does not prescribe every possible signal operation between a combined signals display. It requires that at least one signal is illuminated in a display, and that signal meanings are clear and enforceable.

Importantly, when a steady red disc is displayed it applies to all traffic facing the signal. Whether a red arrow is also displayed or briefly unlit does not change the meaning of the signal. The instruction to drivers remains to stop and not enter the intersection.

I have responded to each part of your request below:

1. What is the correct course of action for a driver in a controlled left turning lane in this scenario?

When a steady red disc is displayed, a driver must not enter the controlled area (the intersection). This requirement is set out in the Land Transport (Road User) Rule 2004 (Road User Rule) which specifies the drivers' responsibilities in a scenario of steady red discs, steady red arrows, or both. The relevant clauses are copied below:

3.2 Traffic signals in form of disc

(5) While a steady red signal in the form of a disc is displayed or 2 alternately flashing red signals in the form of a disc are displayed,—

(a) a driver of a vehicle facing the signal or signals must not enter the controlled area, but a cyclist may enter ahead of a marked vehicle limit line and stop behind a marked cycle limit line:

3.3 Traffic signals in form of arrow

(3) While a red signal in the form of an arrow is displayed,—

(a) a driver facing the signal must not enter the controlled area to proceed in the direction indicated by the signal;

(4) However, when a signal in the form of an arrow is displayed simultaneously with any other signal, in a single or a multi-column traffic signal display,—

(a) the signal in the form of an arrow applies to drivers proceeding or about to proceed in the direction indicated by that signal; and

(b) no other signal or signals apply to that vehicular traffic.

2. Why was this implementation chosen over explicitly making the left arrow red before turning it green again instead of having it unlit briefly? What safety and psychological considerations/assessments have been made regarding this? Is this implementation the result of a technological limitation, a standard operating procedure, or something else?

Signal personality programming (designing the computer program that controls signal phasing at an intersection) is a specialised role that is tailored to the specific characteristics and operational requirements of each intersection. Signal phasing may therefore vary between intersections, provided it complies with the requirements of the Road User Rule and the Traffic Control Devices Rule. These Rules do not prescribe every aspect of signal operation and allow flexibility for signal programmers to determine the most appropriate phasing for a particular intersection.

As signal phasing is designed on an intersection-by-intersection basis, NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) is unable to provide a single reason for implementation or provide specific safety or psychological assessments undertaken for this particular signal operation. The reasons for a particular signal phasing would depend on the design and operational requirements of the specific intersection concerned.

4. Is or was this situation documented on your website? If so, where? When was this first and/or last present?

The responsibilities of drivers at traffic signals, including situations where a red disc is displayed with a red arrow, or where the red arrow is unlit are explained on our website here:

- www.nzta.govt.nz/roadcode/code-for-cycling/intersections/intersections-with-traffic-lights-2#arrow
- www.nzta.govt.nz/roadcode/motorcycle-code/about-riding/giving-way/the-give-way-rules

The website reflects the current content of the Road Code. NZTA does not hold information identifying when this content was first published on the website. As such this information is refused under section 18(g) of the Act because the information requested is not held by NZTA and there are no grounds for believing that the information is either held by or is more closely connected with the functions of another department, Minister of the Crown, organisation or local authority.

5. Is or was this situation documented in the road code book? If so, where? When was this first and/or last present?

Yes. The Road Code explains how drivers must respond to red disc and arrow signals. This information is currently available online:

- www.nzta.govt.nz/driving-skills/learn-to-drive/roadcode/new-zealand-cycling-code/intersections/intersections-with-traffic-lights-2.

NZTA does not hold records confirming when this information was first included in the Road Code. I am therefore required to refuse this part of your request under section 18(g) of the Act. However, based on National Library of New Zealand records, the first edition of The Official New Zealand Road Code published after the Traffic Control Devices Rule came into force appears to have been published in 2007. It is therefore likely that information relating to these signal displays was included in the Road Code by at least that edition however, NZTA cannot confirm a specific publication date.

6. Is or was this situation documented in law? If so, where? When was this first and/or last present?

The operation of traffic signals, including the relationship between red disc and arrow signals, is governed by the Traffic Control Devices Rule. The relevant clauses and amendments are copied below:

6.4 Steady vehicle displays in the form of a continuous display

6.4(1) The configuration and combination of a steady vehicle display must comply with one of the displays in Schedule 3.

Operation of steady vehicle displays

6.4(4) In a single or multi-column steady vehicle display, other than for a roundabout signal or ramp signal display, at least one of the signals must be lit.

6.4(2) A steady vehicle display of a green, yellow or red disc signal applies to all traffic facing those signals, but may be overridden:

(a) for a red disc display, by:

- (i) a green or yellow arrow signal for traffic intending to travel in the direction indicated by the arrow;*
- (ii) a white B signal for buses, a white T signal for light rail vehicles or a green cycle signal for cycles;*
- (iii) a yellow B signal for buses, a yellow T signal for light-rail vehicles or a yellow cycle signal for cycles;*

(b) for a yellow disc display, by:

- (i) a red or green arrow signal for traffic intending to travel in the direction indicated by the arrow;*
- (ii) a red B signal for buses, a red T signal for light-rail vehicles or a red cycle signal for cycles;*

(c) for a green disc display, by:

- (i) a red or yellow arrow signal for traffic intending to travel in the direction indicated by the arrow;*
- (ii) a red B signal for buses, a red T signal for light-rail vehicles or a red cycle signal for cycles.*

6.4(2A) A steady vehicle display of a red arrow applies to all traffic on the roadway intending to travel in the direction indicated by the arrow and is not overridden by a white or yellow B signal for buses, a white or yellow T signal for light-rail vehicles or a green or yellow cycle signal controlling cyclists on a roadway.

Clause 6.4(1): amended, on 1 April 2011, by clause 2.10(1) of Land Transport Rule: Traffic Control Devices Amendment 2010

Clause 6.4(2A): inserted, on 1 November 2014, by clause 2.4(1) of Land Transport Rule: Traffic Control Devices Amendment 2014.

Clause 6.4(2A): replaced, on 3 November 2025, by clause 9.4(1) of Land Transport Rule: Regulatory Systems Amendment 2025

Under section 28 of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review my decision to refuse this request. The contact details for the Ombudsman can be located at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

In line with NZTA policy, this response will soon be published on our website, with personal information removed.

If you would like to discuss this reply with NZTA, please contact the Ministerial Services team by email to official.correspondence@nzta.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jackie Smith', is positioned to the left of a vertical line.

Jackie Smith
Manager, Ministerial Services