



COLORADO
Department of Transportation



Must Carry Chains Signage Guidelines

2025 Edition

Prepared By:



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FHWA Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (2023).

CDOT M&S Standards.

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INTRODUCTION

MISSION

It is the mission of the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to provide the best multi modal transportation system for Colorado that most effectively moves people, goods, and information. CDOT policy, state statute, and federal surface transportation law, place a strong emphasis on creating a system for use by persons of all ages and abilities for safe and convenient access to jobs, services, schools, and recreation. The Chief Engineer Design Guidance express support for taking a flexible approach when designing and planning our state transportation system, and to identify resources which can be used to provide context sensitive solutions particularly related to bicycle and pedestrian accommodation.

PURPOSE

Effective September 1, 2024, Colorado law (SB24-100) requires both larger and smaller vehicles to be properly equipped when traveling on all the following roads from September 1 through May 31, regardless of the weather conditions, as is captured on the Colorado State Patrol website (<https://csp.colorado.gov/chain-law-information>) and summarized here. SB24-100 is captured on the Colorado General Assembly website (<https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb24-100>).

- I-70 west of milepost 259 (Morrison) to the Utah border
- Colorado Highway 9 milepost 63 to milepost 97 (Frisco to Fairplay)
- Route 40 milepost 256 (Empire) to the Utah border
- U.S. Route 50 milepost 225 (Salida) to the Utah border
- U.S. Route 160 milepost 304 (Walsenburg) to the New Mexico border
- U.S. Route 285 milepost 250 (Morrison) to the New Mexico border
- All of U.S Route 550

Vehicles with a gross combined weight rating (GCWR) or gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 16,000 pounds or more, as well as those designed to transport 16 or more passengers (including the driver) on public highways must carry chains.

Four-wheel drive vehicles less than 16,000 lbs., must have tires with a tread depth of at least 3/16-inch and be adequate for winter driving conditions. Two-wheel drive vehicles with a GCWR/GVWR less than 16,000 pounds travelling on the previously stated segments must have the following:

- Tire chains for two or more drive tires; or
- Approved alternate traction devices (ATDs) for two or more drive tries; or
- Tires with a tread depth of 3/16-inch at minimum and classified as either “All weather” or “Mud and Snow” (M+S, M/S, or an icon of a mountain with a snowflake).

The penalty for not complying with the “Must Carry” law is a \$50 fine and a \$17 surcharge.

BACKGROUND

Colorado's chain law is essential for safety and traffic flow during severe winter weather, especially on mountainous routes. These regulations require commercial and passenger vehicles to carry and use tire chains or alternative traction devices under specific conditions. Non-compliance can result in fines, as well as increased crash risks, making the law crucial for keeping roads accessible.

To ensure public safety, the “Must Carry” law mandates that certain vehicles carry chains on designated routes from September through May. The following signage guidance was developed to support the enforcement of this requirement in Colorado.

GENERAL INFORMATION

DEFINITIONS

The **Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)** defines the standards used by Traffic Engineers nationwide to install and maintain traffic control devices on all public streets, highways, bikeways, and private roads open to the public.

GUIDANCE

This guidance outlines the recommended installation of “Must Carry” signs at locations where the law is in effect.

SIGNAGE

To effectively notify larger vehicle operators of the “Must Carry” chain law, the following sign should be used along designated corridors from September through May. The primary sign follows MUTCD regulatory sign guidance and uses both symbols and text to communicate the requirement. It features images of various larger vehicle types along with the statement: “OVER 16,000 GVWR MUST CARRY CHAINS SEPTEMBER THRU MAY.” Directly below, a supplemental plaque may be installed, stating: “UP TO \$1,500 FINE.”

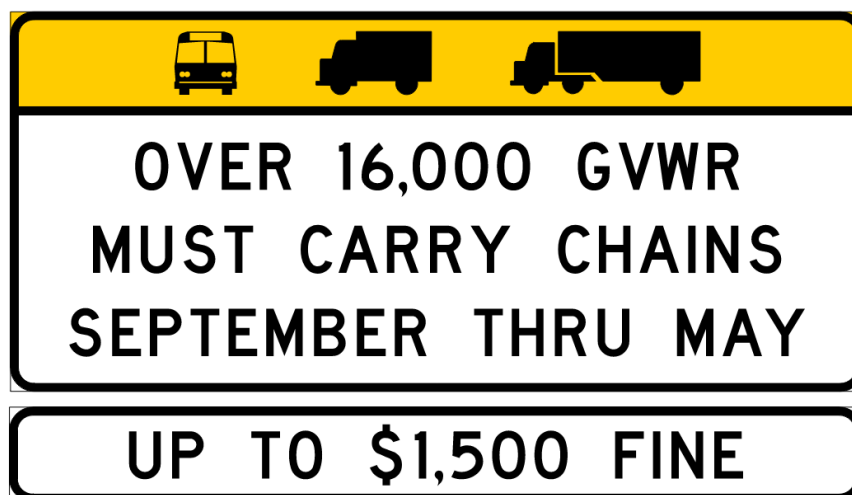


Figure 1: Proposed New Colorado Must Carry Sign

SIGN PLACEMENT

The “Must Carry” signs may be placed at all interstate, U.S. highway, and state highway border entrances to Colorado to inform drivers arriving from neighboring states about the requirements. Additionally, signs should be installed at the beginning of the specific corridors within Colorado where the law is enforced, specifically on the routes that begin or end within the state. Figure 3 provides a map highlighting all of the Must Carry corridors throughout the state, as well as the state boundaries, U.S. and state highways, and interstates. Figure 4 provides a map of the proposed locations identified. The yellow pins are existing sign locations to be updated with the new proposed sign, while the green pins are new sign locations to meet the above recommended sign placement. Final sign placement shall be decided by the Region Traffic Engineer.

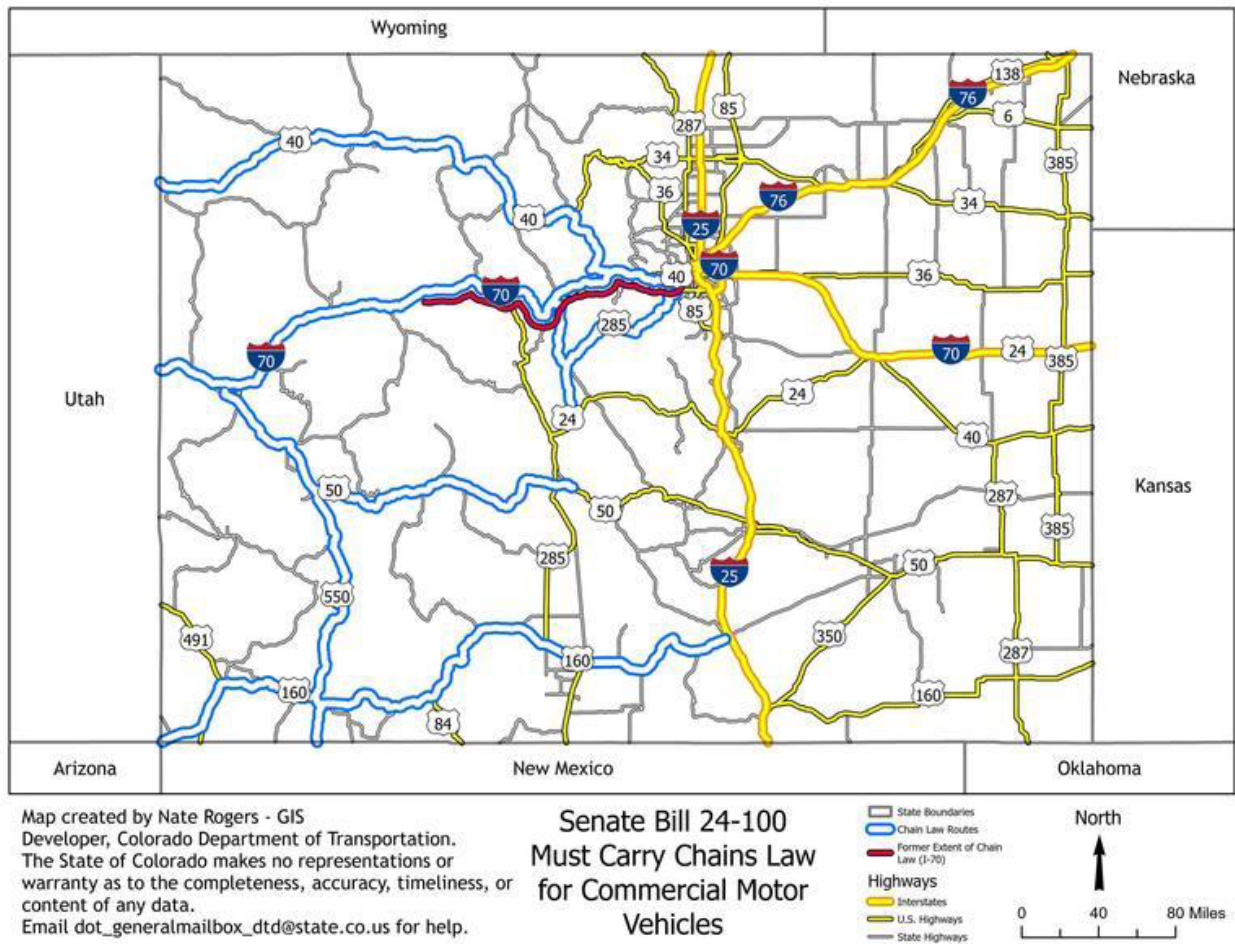


Figure 3: Map of Colorado's Must Carry Corridors

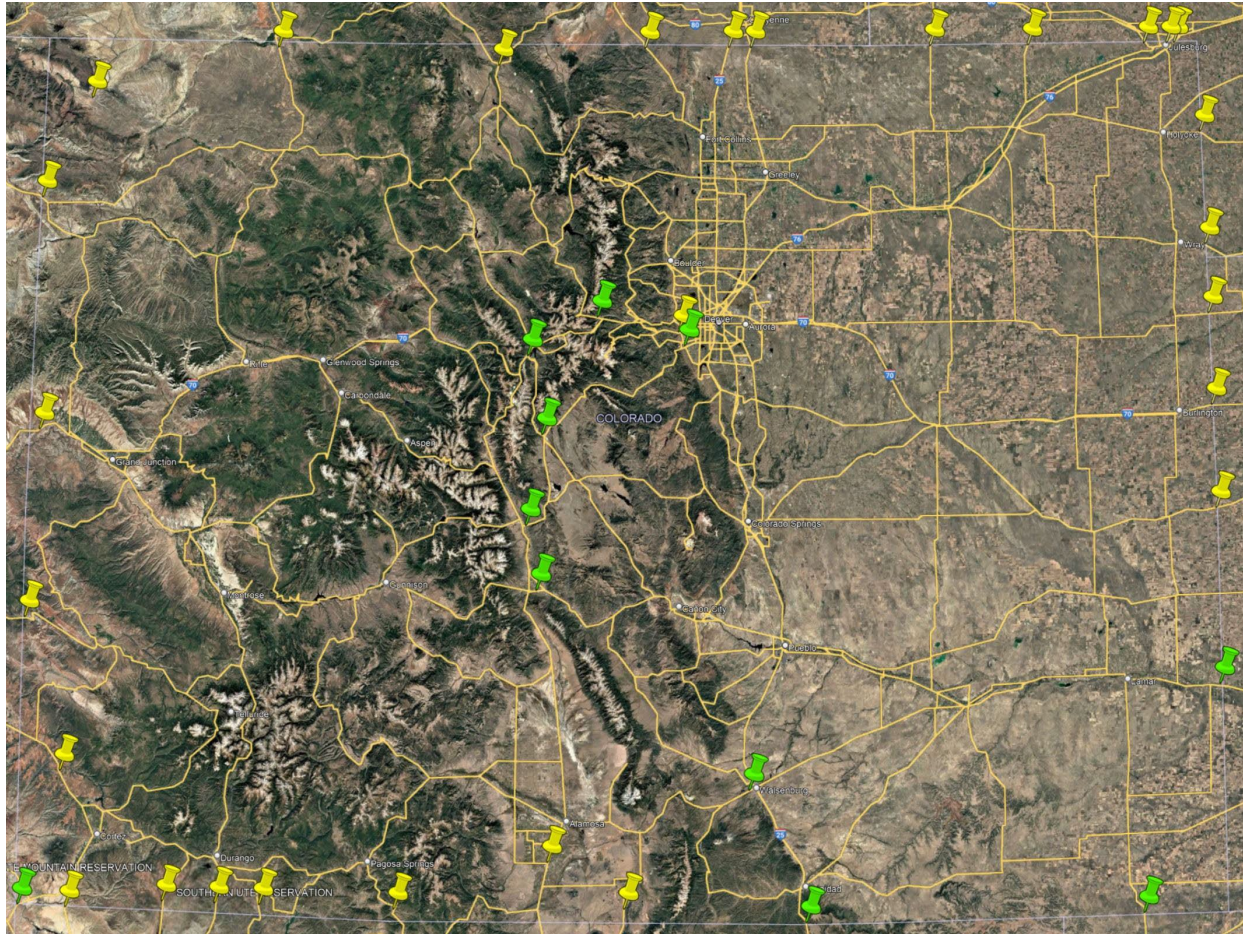


Figure 4: Map of Proposed Locations



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