

Signs of the Time
Assessment and Workshops
August 2006 - November 2009

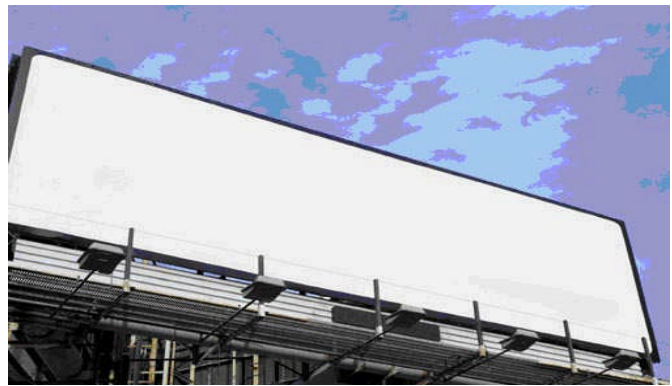
Location: National

Background

Billboards are a familiar sight on many highways across the United States. The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Outdoor Advertising Control (OAC) Program was set up to provide rules concerning outdoor signage on federally funded highways, such as interstates. How billboards and signs are regulated has been an increasing source of controversy since 1965 when the Highway Beautification Act (HBA) was passed. Billboard companies, advocates for scenic beauty, landowners, government officials, and the traveling public are all affected.

As a result of the mounting controversy, in 2006 FHWA asked the Institute to conduct an assessment of the OAC Program. The goal of the assessment was to gain a better understanding of the issues, engage in dialogue with all the people and groups involved, and identify opportunities for collaborative problem-solving.

The assessment was completed in January 2007 and recommendations are being implemented.



Results and Accomplishments

The assessment report identified issues, described points of view, identified options for resolving controversial issues, and created momentum for issue resolution. Some issues were identified as appropriate for collaborative problem-solving among concerned parties, including new sign technology, non-conforming signs, and vegetation-clearing around billboards.

Important steps have been taken since the report was issued.

- The FHWA issued guidance and is undertaking research related to digital billboards.
- A workshop with representatives from FHWA, state regulators, and interested stakeholders took place in December 2008 to address a specific non-conforming signs issue: the definition of “destroyed signs.” The workshop resulted in a new definition distributed in FHWA guidance.
- A second workshop took place in November 2009 with state regulators and with input from representatives of interested stakeholders to formulate a definition of “customary maintenance” of non-conforming signs.

Highlights

A group of representatives from each of the interested parties was assembled to help plan the assessment. The group selected the assessors (the Osprey Group) and helped develop the approach. Public meetings, focus groups and private interviews were held in seven cities where outdoor advertising is controversial. In all, 153 individuals participated directly and more than 1,800 opinions from the public were posted in the Federal Register. This combination of methods proved highly effective in reaching a broad audience and in shaping the final report. The assessment report can be found here:

<http://www.ecr.gov/pdf/oac.pdf>

Credits

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