

Scenic Watch

Citizens for a Scenic Florida



January 2013

Are Billboards Distracting?



Photo: thewest.com.au

Articles About The Study Published in Traffic Injury Prevention Journal

"...A Swedish study published in the journal Traffic Injury Prevention concludes that digital billboards hold the gaze of drivers longer than two seconds. Previous studies have shown that anything that takes a driver's eyes off the road for longer than two seconds increases the risks of a crash.

'This study validates what is common sense when it comes to digital billboards,' said a statement from Mary Tracy, president of Scenic America, a national nonprofit group that seeks to limit billboards.

Bright, constantly changing signs on the side of the road are meant to attract and keep the attention of drivers, and this study confirms that is exactly what they do'..."

-- San Jose Mercury News

"The Swedish Government commissioned the study as part of a trial run for digital billboards in the city of Stockholm. As a result this study and

Injury Lawyer Chimes In On Question of Liability As Two New Studies Point to Safety Issues

Articles About The Study From Austroads

"Billboards are Dangerous for Drivers"

"Roadside advertising distracts drivers and new-generation billboards that move or are well lit can be a safety threat, an analysis of international research shows.

The report by Austroads, which represents all Australian road authorities, including Main Roads, said regulations for most Australian roadside advertising had not kept pace with new billboards, particularly digital displays.

'It is now widely recognised that distraction is a significant contributor to crashes,' the report said.

Though the focus had been on mobile phones, there was more recognition of distractions outside the vehicle and convincing studies showed advertising might cause poorer vehicle control.

'With the emergence of digital technology, advertising scenes can change frequently . . . and it is this potential for movement that is of special concern,'" it said...

The Austroads report said there was no doubt roadside advertising with 'movement or changes in luminance' could capture a driver's attention.

Roadside environments cluttered with advertising could also make it difficult to see relevant, driving-related signage.

The report said 'emotional or engaginh' advertising could also impair driving performance... "

another about driver attitudes toward the billboards by the same authors (not yet published in English), the Government removed the billboards at the end of the trial period..."

-- Scenic America

[Read full story in San Jose Mercury News here>](#)

[Read full story in Thewest.com here>](#)

[Visit Scenic America here>](#)

-- thewest.com.au

'Australian legal expert has said outdoor advertising companies could be found liable if a driver caused an accident and blamed the incident on a billboard. Digital billboards are designed to distract drivers and outdoor advertisers are 'defenseless' against claims of doing so, said John Voyage of the law firm Maurice Blackburn.'

-- Scenic America

February



Fun Festivals and Events

Central Florida

Feb 1-29

ArtsFest 2012, Orlando

Feb 4-5

The Mount Dora Arts Festival, Mount Dora

Feb 17-19

Megacon, Orlando

Jan 18-March 24

Real Music Concert Series, Tampa Bay

Feb 4-5

7th Annual Art in the Park and Music Festival, Lady Lake

Feb 9-12

Fort Foster Rendezvous, Hillsborough River State Park, Thonotosassa

Feb 11-12

4th Annual Art and Craft Festival, Holmes Beach

Feb 11-March 4

Bands Brew and BBQ music festival, Orlando

Feb 11-April 14

Universal Studios Mardi Gras,

Update: Clay Co, Florida

Citizens Influence Wins "Modifications to Green Cove Springs Proposal"



Photo: Bob, Self, The Times-Union

"Fleming Island resident Candace Bridgewater holds up a photograph of an offensive billboard as she spoke against electronic billboards..."

"GREEN COVE SPRINGS - Months of controversy came to an end at the Jan. 8 Clay County Commission meeting as revisions to two county regulations – one involving electronic game machines and the other digital billboards – came up for votes, with only the digital billboard measure passing...."

The digital billboards ...created a lively debate as commissioners took up the question of whether to revise the county's sign code to allow for them.

Extensive work was done on the sign code in 1998 and 2004, with the result being that new billboards were effectively banned in Clay County and existing billboards, if severely damaged or destroyed, could not be replaced. The idea was that billboards would eventually age out of existence in the county.

Orlando

Feb 17-19

Wine Fest XXII, Clermont

Feb 17-19

The 128th Silver Spurs Rodeo of
Champions, Kissimmee

Feb 25-26

Art and Craft Festival, Flager Beach

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South Florida

Feb 3-5

Everglades Seafood Festival,
Everglades City

Feb 4-5

Artfest Fort Myers, Fort Myers

Feb 4-5

11th Annual Hobe Sound Festival of
the Arts, Hobe Sound

Feb 4-5

Everglades Seafood Festival,
Everglades City

Feb 10-12

Florida's Creative Coast Weekend,
Pine Island

Feb 11-12

18th Annual Pigeon Key Art Festival,
Marathon

Feb 11-12

12th Annual Bonita Springs National
Art Festival, Bonita Springs

Feb 13-14

Sweetheart Express on Seminole
Gulf Railway, Fort Myers

Feb 12

Edison Festival of Light Junior
Events, Fort Myers

Feb 16-20

Strictly Sail Miami Boat Show,
Miami

Feb 17-18

51st Annual Historic House Tours,
Key West

Feb 17-19

Edison Festival of Lights Crafts on
the River, Fort Myers

Feb 18

Edison Festival of Light Grand
Parade, Fort Myers

Feb 18-19

20th Annual Downtown Dunedin
Craft Festival, Tampa Bay

Opponents to the digital billboards have said they are dangerous because they distract drivers and approving the sign code revisions to allow for them would have a domino effect that would see a new proliferation of billboards in the county. But those in favor of them dispute their dangers and say they are helpful for such issues as traffic and Amber and Silver alerts. Proponents also argue that the "swapdown" portion of the new ordinance would actually result in fewer total billboards countywide as traditional billboards would be required to come down before a company could put up a digital billboard.

Commissioners had little argument about the digital billboards, but decided to add to the areas they would not be allowed by taking out Kingsley Avenue and all of U.S. Hwy. 17 from the mix...."

-- Doug Conkey, Clay Today

[Read full Clay Today article here>](#)
[Read full Mayport Mirror article here>](#)

Legal News:

Lawsuit Seeks to Overturn FHWA Ruling on Digital Billboards



Photo: Scenic America

"On January 23, 2013, Scenic America filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia seeking to overturn a controversial Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) ruling. The ruling reversed the agency's long-held position that barred intermittently changing commercial digital billboards. The lawsuit alleges that FHWA has wrongfully allowed commercial digital billboards to proliferate along federal highways nationwide.

FHWA's 2007 ruling says that commercial messaging signs changing as frequently as every 4 seconds, like the one above, are not 'intermittent.'

The lawsuit, filed on behalf of Scenic America and its members by Georgetown

Feb 18-19

Rotary Club Arts and Crafts Fair,
Sanibel Island

Feb 20-26

Winter Star Party, Florida Keys

Feb 24-26

Everglades Bluegrass Festival, Miami
Beach

Feb 24-26

Greek Fest, Fort Myers

Feb 24-26

Big Cypress Shootout, Clewiston

Feb 24-March 4

Southwest Florida and Lee County
Fair, North Fort Myers

Feb 25-26

Annual Old Island Days Art Festival,
Key West

Feb 25-26

17th Annual Upper Keys Gigantic
Nautical Flea Market, Islamorada

Feb 18-March 11

Carnaval Miami, Miami area

Feb 25

Burrowing Owl Festival, Cape Coral

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North Florida

Feb 11

Flight To Freedom, St. Augustine

Feb 12

Second Saturdays Arttrageous
Artwalk, Fernandina Beach

Feb 17-18

Mardi Gras At The Beach, Panama
City Beach

Feb 18

Grand Mardi Gras Parade, Pensacola

Feb 25-26

Art and Craft Festival, Flager Beach

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Law Center's Institute for Public Representation, asserts that FHWA's 2007 guidance violates the lighting standards established under the customary use provisions of Lady Bird Johnson's Highway Beautification Act.

'For over five years we have pleaded with FHWA to do the right thing and revoke the memorandum,' said Mary Tracy, president of Scenic America. 'In every instance, they have turned a blind eye to the standards established by the Highway Beautification Act. These standards were meant to protect all citizens from the trespassing glow of digital billboards flashing commercial advertisements along high-speed roadways. Because the agency has ignored the law, today we are asking the Court to tell FHWA to follow the law.'

Digital billboards, brightly-lit signs with commercial messages that change intermittently every few seconds, appeared along federal highways around 2005. State transportation officials, charged with controlling outdoor advertising and following FHWA's longstanding prohibition on intermittent commercial message lighting, turned to FHWA for additional guidance. Under immense pressure from a powerful billboard lobby to approve the signs, FHWA reversed its long-held position.

Since FHWA reversed its position, the number of digital billboards has risen to nearly 4,000 (nearly a 400% increase) around the country. Most of these billboards operate along the federal highways regulated under the HBA. Drivers are being distracted, adjacent properties are being devalued, homes are being invaded by lights shining through windows, and many individuals and scenic groups have spent thousands of dollars and thousands more hours trying to stop these invasive signs.

'We receive distress calls from people all over the country who find these TVs-on-a-stick lining our highways to be distracting eyesores, and in some instances the signs even shine into the windows of nearby homes,' said Tracy. 'These billboards devalue private property, distract drivers, tarnish the beauty of our natural and built landscapes and negatively impact the quality of life for many people. FHWA has been totally unresponsive, and we can no longer stand by and watch this agency ignore Lady Bird's Highway Beautification Act.'

Representing Scenic America are Thomas Gremillion, Staff Attorney, and Hope Babcock, Director, of the Institute for Public Representation, Georgetown University Law Center."

-- Scenic America

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Photo: The Gazette

News Around the Country:

Trend Toward Banning Billboards

"Cedar Rapids: No More New Billboards...For 180 Days "

[Read Gazette article here>](#)



Note from the Editor

Suggestions for improvement are always welcome.

"Kalamazoo City Commissioners Unanimously Impose Moratorium On Digital Billboards "

[Read WKZO article here>](#)

"Knox County Commissioners Gave Initial Approval To An Ordinance That Blocks The Conversion Of Traditional Billboards To Digital Ones "

[Read News Sentinel Editorial here>](#)