

Traffic Safety

Message Points

- The presence or absence of billboards – even the most attention-getting billboards – does not significantly affect driver behavior
- Digital billboards are not distracting to drivers, according to government research
- Analysis of years of accident records shows that digital billboards are not related to accidents. State and local analysis of accident data confirms this point. Meanwhile, drivers glance at digital billboards a bit longer compared to conventional billboards, but typical glances are well under the risk threshold established by the federal government.

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Traffic safety experts have studied the relationship between outdoor advertising and traffic accidents since the 1950's, finding no evidence that billboards are linked to traffic accidents.

“. . .the presence of billboards does not cause a change in driver behavior, in terms of visual behavior, speed maintenance, or lane keeping.” – Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, December 15, 2003

The Government – via state transportation agencies – routinely uses signs in the right-of-way and message boards to provide information to motorists, including information intended to enhance safety.

A comprehensive study released in December 2001 by The Road Information Program (TRIP) said urban fatalities are typically caused by poor road conditions and mistakes by drivers.

In 2007, FHWA reaffirmed that states have authority to allow digital billboards, as long as these roadside signs do not flash, scroll, or feature full motion video. Industry-sponsored research said that digital billboards are not related to accidents. State and local authorities also have reviewed accident data; their analysis produces the same conclusion:

“I have no indication that digital billboards pose any safety threat to the traveling public.” – **El Paso County Sheriff Richard D. Wiles**, El Paso, TX, July 13, 2009

“Despite being placed on heavily traveled city streets, there has not been one accident attributed to a driver being distracted by the billboard.” – **Gary Mulleneaux**, Rochester (MN) Police Department, December 2, 2008

“Our study has turned up no accidents reported to local police in the vicinity of the digital signs we’ve been monitoring,” said **James R. Barrett, Regulatory and Compliance Manager, Virginia DOT**, September 24, 2007

“The study based on the period of review (six months after installation of digital billboards) does not highlight a problem with the digital billboards. Also, as of August 28, 2007, the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) has not received any complaints in regard to the digital billboards,” said **Deputy State (South Carolina DOT) Highway Engineer Dipak M. Patel**, September 6, 2007.

Experts have analyzed thousands of accident records in varying localities. Accident data does not show a statistical relationship between accidents and billboards (conventional or digital). Accidents occur with or without billboards.

Accident reports are a standard tool for policy makers. “Traffic records data are the basis for defining, managing, and evaluating traffic safety and performance,” according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

In 2007, the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute released research that said digital billboards are “safety neutral.” This study used an instrumented vehicle to measure eye glances; the typical glance in the direction of a digital billboard was less than one second. A separate comprehensive study sponsored by the federal government (the “100-Car Study,” released in 2006) said glances totaling more than two seconds for any purpose increase near-crash/crash risk by at least two times the norm.

On December 30, 2013, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) released the findings of its multi-year research on drivers' behavior in proximity to digital billboards. The government's findings tracked the outcome of industry-sponsored research, which found no connections to accidents.

"DOT study finds digital billboards don't distract drivers," said the headline in *The Hill* newspaper in Washington, DC (January 7, 2014).

Meanwhile, independent experts say that traffic fatalities and accidents are caused by factors other than billboards. More than half of U.S. highway fatalities are related to deficient roadway conditions – a substantially more lethal factor than drunk driving, speeding or non-use of safety belts – according to a study released in 2009. The Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) concluded that making the roadway environment more protective and forgiving is essential to reducing highway fatalities and costs.

References

(Click [here](#) for the references listed below)

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