



Outdoor Advertising Association of America

Report from State Highway Officials calls for Regulation of Digital Billboards

What is the new report?

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) commissioned a report on traffic safety and digital billboards. The new report was prepared by Jerry Watchel of The Veridian Group, Berkley, CA, based on a literature review. **It does not call for a ban, but rather says digital billboards should be regulated** as a means of protecting the public interest.

What key regulations does the report suggest?

The AASHTO report calls for regulation of:

- spacing and duration of message (variable criteria)
- placement near interchanges, curves, and official roadway signs
- lighting brightness

“The good news is that regulatory bodies and billboard companies seem to reach similar conclusions about maximum luminance.” – Page 157

What does the federal government say?

In 2007, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued guidance to states on how to regulate digital billboards. FHWA said states could authorize digital billboards as long as they don't flash or scroll. Further, FHWA told states to regulate:

- spacing (defers to states)
- dwell time (recommends eight seconds)
- lighting (avoid glare)
- malfunction (industry adopted guidelines)

Industry practices and state regulations conform to federal guidance.

What does industry research say?

Comprehensive studies were performed by Tantala Associates, a consulting engineering firm based in Philadelphia, PA, which has performed analytical research for the government. Researchers examined over 85,000 government accident records covering almost 16 years and collectively studied around 29 different digital billboards in 3 different cities. Analyses of accident records showed “digital billboards have no statistical relationship with the occurrence of accidents.”

Meanwhile, drivers tend to glance at digital billboards a bit longer than conventional billboards, but not too long. A typical glance in the direction of a digital billboard is less than one second. A government-sponsored study said crash risks increase when glances exceed two seconds (“100 Car Crash Study” by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).