

Digital signage examples from other cities

by Gregory Young

To date, no known city has passed limits on sign energy usage, but about one quarter of states in the U.S. prohibits moving or animated signs, and roughly one third have specifications for dwell time ranging from four seconds to several minutes. Most states prohibit flashing red lights and anything that causes a glare or vision impairment.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

A proposed amendment to Pittsburgh's zoning code states that no electronic sign may exceed .3 foot candles illumination above ambient light level to prevent distraction and interference with traffic signals. As discussed earlier in this paper, OAAA recommends foot candles in its guidelines but the usefulness of this measurement has been questioned and nits is the preferred measurement for detecting brightness and glare emitted from digital signs). Additionally, Pittsburgh's amendment sets a dwell time of at least ten seconds, and prohibits animation of any kind.¹

Concord, New Hampshire

Some cities and states have banned electronic message boards outright, including Concord, New Hampshire. There, the ban on electronic message centers was upheld on appeal to the First Circuit Court, on grounds that the ban promoted both traffic safety and community aesthetics (Carpentier, 2009).²

Panama City Beach, Florida

In the absence of a cohesive state or federal policy, residents and policy makers in Panama City Beach, Florida decided they could not allow digital signage to continue to proliferate unfettered. They drafted a set of restrictions on sign size, placement and brightness which have been incorporated into the City Code. "The specifications make regulation seem like an exact science, when it's really just public and private actors negotiating acceptable limits," voices one critic. While imperfect, it sets a valuable precedent for regulation because the proposed ordinance limits the amount of light digital signs can emit, their illumination must be measured and monitored by an instrument widely available and specially designed for this purpose.

Tulsa, Oklahoma

The study "Digital Billboard Recommendations and Comparisons to Conventional Billboards" recommends billboard brightness of 342 nits for an average sized (10'6" x 36') billboard under average ambient lighting conditions (Lewin, 2008).³ In response to these recommendations, the Planning Commission of Tulsa, Oklahoma recommended a limit of 300 nits for all signage, but this was raised to 500 nits before becoming law, due to pressure from the outdoor advertising industry.

¹ The Pittsburgh Code, Title Nine, Zoning Code, Article VI, Chapter 919, Signs.

² Naser Jewelers, Inc. v. City of Concord, 2008. WL 162521 (C.A. 1 N.H. 1/18/2008)

³ n.b. This study was funded by the Outdoor Advertising Association of America.

Municipalities that ban or limit digital billboards

STATE	CITY/COUNTY	ACTION TAKEN
Alaska	(state)	Ban
Arizona	Gilbert	Ban
Arizona	Pima County	Moratorium
California	Los Angeles	Moratorium
California	San Francisco	Ban
Colorado	Denver	Ban
Florida	Largo	Ban
Florida	Pinellas County	Moratorium
Florida	St. Petersburg	Ban
Georgia	Atlanta	Moratorium
Hawaii	(state)	Ban
Maine	(state)	Ban
Michigan	(state)	Considering Moratorium
Minnesota	Minnetonka	Moratorium
Minnesota	Oakdale	Moratorium
Minnesota	(state)	Considering Moratorium
Missouri	Lake St. Louis	Ban
Missouri	St. Louis	Moratorium
Montana	(state)	Ban
North Carolina	Durham	Ban
Rhode Island	(state)	Moratorium
Tennessee	Knoxville	Ban
Texas	Amarillo	Ban
Texas	Austin	Ban
Texas	Dallas	Ban
Texas	El Paso	Moratorium
Texas	Ft. Worth	Ban
Texas	Galveston	Ban
Texas	Houston	Ban
Texas	San Antonio	Moratorium
Vermont	(state)	Ban