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Experts skewer feds' digital billboard safety study

WASHINGTON – The first comprehensive review of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) digital billboard safety study says the study's conclusions are seriously flawed.

The critique by the Veridian Group, peer reviewed by 14 international experts in human factors and traffic safety, found that FHWA's study fails at its principal task of determining whether digital billboards pose a risk to traffic safety. The critique was first publicized by the Eno Center for Transportation, the nation's leading transportation think tank.

The critique concludes that: "Rather than providing a justifiable direction for Federal policy regarding [digital billboards], the report leaves State and local Governments in limbo because of decisions, errors and internal conflicts that call its findings into question."

Veridian's critique found serious concerns with FHWA's report in the following areas:

- The equipment used was unproven, the researchers were not experienced with it, and the data suffered as a result;
- The billboards studied by FHWA were dramatically less bright than those studied elsewhere, suggesting they would have attracted less driver attention;
- The number of billboards included in the data is paltry: 4 digital and 4 static billboards in each of two cities, a total of 16 signs.
- Differences between eye glance duration reported in the draft report (which one peer reviewer called 'not credible') and those listed in the final report;
- Other significant and unexplained differences between the peer reviewed draft report released in 2010 and the final report, issued in December 2013, which was not peer reviewed.

"For more than a year the billboard industry has been touting FHWA's study as proof positive that digital billboards do not pose a threat to traffic safety," said Mary Tracy, president of Scenic America. "With the Veridian critique, we know that the issue of digital billboards and traffic safety is far from settled, and any public agency considering allowing the bright, blinking signs on their roadsides should take this critique into account first."

Download the critique from the Veridian Group's website: <http://bit.ly/1CyyWLU>

Scenic America is the only national 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the scenic character of America's roadways, countryside and communities.

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