

Sign Control News

Newsletter of the Center for Sign Control • A project of the Coalition for Scenic Beauty

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TENNESSEE GOVERNOR CAMPAIGNS FOR SCENIC HIGHWAYS

Saying "I believe tourists come to Tennessee to see the scenery, not the billboards," Governor Lamar Alexander of Tennessee introduced new legislation in January to clean-up Tennessee highways. Announced at a press conference in Nashville, the Governor's proposal would:

- Create 670 billboard-free miles of interstate highway, and remove 2,447 existing billboards in rural areas;
- Establish 16 scenic corridors with no billboards and no junkyards;
- Ban tree-cutting on state property in front of billboards;
- Limit new billboards on primary highways to zoned commercial and industrial areas and increase spacing;
- Screen and landscape the 100 worst looking junkyards along Tennessee highways;
- Establish a billboard watch program to help local communities control billboards;
- Make Tennessee the 25th state to use logo signs at interstate exits;
- Continue to protect 2,810 miles of scenic parkways by banning new billboards and junkyards on the state's system of primary and interstate highways;
- Implement a privilege tax of \$250 a year for billboards along interstates and \$50 a year for



Governor Alexander

TEXAS ENACTS TOUGH NEW BILLBOARD REGULATIONS

New billboard regulations adopted by the Texas Highway Commission are expected to dramatically reduce available sites for future billboards along Texas' 5,000 miles of interstate highways and urban freeways.

In a unanimous vote the Highway Commission set new height, spacing, and placement requirements on billboards. The new regulations include a 1,500 foot spacing requirement between billboards on the same side of major roadways. This is a three-fold increase from

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

SENATORS PELL AND COHEN BECOME EIGHTH AND NINTH SPONSORS OF GORTON BILL

Senators Claiborne Pell (D-RI) and William Cohen (R-Maine) have become the eighth and ninth co-sponsors of SB 1494, authored by Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA). This bill contains positive changes to the Highway Beautification Act.

A spokesperson for Senator Pell, Bill Bryant, said that the bill was brought to the Senator's attention by constituents. "When he looked at it closely," said Bryant, "He became very enthusiastic and signed on."

Senator Cohen is of course from Maine, a state which has eliminated all billboards.

The Gorton Bill would stop the construction of new billboards along federal-aid highways,

prohibit tree cutting on the right of way in front of billboards, provide a five year amortization period for the removal of non-conforming signs, remove the Department of Transportation's authority to waive penalties and require an annual DOT report of compliance to Congress. The bill is still very much alive and is currently before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

The bill's other sponsors are Senators Evans (R-WA), Hatfield (R-OR), Matsunaga (D-HI), Moynihan (D-NY), Chafee (R-RI), and Wilson (R-CA).

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please write to your Senator urging support of SB 1494.

BILLBOARD INDUSTRY SPONSORS AMENDMENTS TO U.S. HIGHWAY BILL

Four billboard industry sponsored amendments have been introduced in the Highway Bill (HR 3129) currently pending before the U.S. House Public Works and Transportation Committee. The amendments would further weaken the Highway Beautification Act and are opposed by the Coalition for Scenic Beauty. The four proposed amendments in HR 3129 would:

- provide \$5,000,000 a year out of the Highway Trust Fund to pay the billboard industry to remove unwanted billboards;

- prohibit federal-aid highway projects unless the state agrees not to

displace any billboards on state property under lease unless such displacement is necessitated by the project and relocation assistance is paid to the billboard company under a Uniform Relocation Act (see the fourth proposal below);

- amend mass transit law to require payments similar to the above proposal;

- establish a Uniform Relocation Act which would require (for the first time) payment of up to \$20,000 for the removal of a billboard regardless of actual expenses.

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ARIZONA COMMUNITIES FIGHT BILLBOARD POLLUTION

Arizona is fast becoming a battleground between communities concerned about visual pollution and billboard companies bent on scarring the landscape. In November, 1985, voters in Tucson adopted tough new billboard controls (see SCN Oct-Nov '85). Soon afterwards, Phoenix extended its billboard moratorium. Now, Mesa and Glendale are following suit while looking into adoption of new sign ordinances. What's happening in Arizona?

"It's a combination of two things," explains Bob Christ, Highway Beautification Administrator for the State of Arizona. "There have been frequent complaints in the newspapers from residents and tourists about billboards. Every now and then you see a letter to the editor about it." In other words, the public is upset.

"Also, the City Fathers are waking up and seeing the result of what they let happen years before," Christ told SCN. Many communities' sign ordinances were originally loosely drafted and now they are finding their municipalities overrun with billboards.

The Beautification Administrator said that the problem is very noticeable in cities and small towns that years ago strip-zoned stretches of highway for commercial use. On many of these strips the only visible commercial activity is towering billboards, says Bob Christ. Within zoned commercial and industrial lands, billboards can be spaced along highways as close as 300 feet outside a municipality and 100 feet inside a municipality. In some places billboard pollution is so bad, there are billboards every 100 feet.

In Phoenix, the city Council in January asked its Sign Ordinance Review Committee to draft a new ordinance that allows for some compromise between the industry and beautification. The ordinance that emerges, according to a source on the committee, will come out just short of banning billboards in Phoenix. The City Council is expected to act on the committee's suggestions by May.

When Phoenix imposed a billboard moratorium last July, this created problems for the nearby communities of Glendale and Mesa. Billboard companies immediately sought available sites outside Phoenix and zeroed in on these outlying towns. But, both municipalities have responded by passing their own moratoriums and placing their own sign ordinances under review.

Ray Jacobs, a Planner for the city of Glendale, told SCN that the town is facing a couple of problems: some zoning has been done primarily to allow billboards to be erected, not for development to occur and new freeway approaches are scheduled to be completed into Glendale. Now, the town must decide if it wants billboards to line them. At the moment, Glendale's City Council has formed a sign committee to evaluate the current ordinance and try to find answers to these problems.

Billboards didn't appear overnight in Arizona but many city officials are just now opening their eyes to the problem of visual pollution. Bob Christ sums up the current political activity in the state

WISCONSIN CONSIDERS BILLBOARD LEGISLATION

Working with State Senator Joseph Strol and other legislators, the Wisconsin Coalition for Billboard Control has introduced a new bill which would reduce billboard clutter on Wisconsin's rural highways.

This bill would close the loopholes which allow off-premise billboards along rural highways in Wisconsin.

The bill would also remove current state limitations that force Wisconsin to await federal appropriations before the state can remove billboards.

In commenting on the legislation, State Coalition President Virginia Kraut said, "the proper control of billboards is a visual pollution issue that concerns not only

conservationists, environmentalists, and outdoorsmen but also those who would welcome new businesses and tourists to this wonderful state. The billboard growth in Wisconsin should also concern all taxpayers who provide the dollars for highways that serve as the marketplace for billboards. They have also paid millions of dollars to remove billboards only to find new ones added every day."

Introduction of the Wisconsin legislation follows publication of a statewide scientific poll on citizens' attitudes toward billboards. The poll demonstrated that the vast majority of Wisconsin citizens agreed that "billboards are ruining the scenic beauty of Wisconsin."

DENVER SAYS NO TO FREEWAY BILLBOARDS

In 1971 the City of Denver, Colorado banned all billboards along its urban freeway system. However, last year the billboard lobby tried to overturn Denver's 15 year old billboard ban and sought the city's permission to erect at least 50 new billboards. In late December, the Denver City Council said no. It passed a measure that will continue to ban all billboards within 660 feet of its freeways. The passage of the legislation guarantees Denver motorists billboard-free vistas along Interstates 70 and 25.

In commenting on the billboard ban, Council member Ted Hackworth told the Rocky Mountain News (12/17/85) that "Billboards...are ugly, and their proliferation obscures views of the city and the mountains."

FREDERICK, MARYLAND BANS BILLBOARDS

Frederick, Maryland has joined the growing list of cities which have voted to ban construction of any new billboards. The Frederick News reports that in January Frederick's Board of Aldermen voted to ban any new billboards in the rapidly growing Maryland community.

Billboards had already been prohibited in the city's historic district and were otherwise restricted to industrial and heavy commercial areas. However, now the Aldermen have banished new billboards altogether from Frederick's city limits.

Like their counterparts in hundreds of other communities, Frederick officials recognized that visual quality has an important impact on the liveability of the built environment.

NEVADA PLACES MORATORIUM ON BILLBOARDS

Billboard construction in the unincorporated areas of Washoe County, Nevada which includes the city of Reno has been halted for the time being. Billboard construction was stopped in this gambling/resort town after a 50 foot monopole monster was erected about 200 feet from a new residential subdivision. The giant billboard visible from the subdivision was considered the last straw in a community plagued by billboard blight. The Board of Washoe County Commissioners, at the request of three county departments, acted in April 1985 and imposed a billboard moratorium. The moratorium continues in effect while the County Planning Department reviews the current ordinance and evaluates all aspects of the sign control issue.

The current sign ordinance banishes billboards to heavy commercial and industrial areas, but many residents feel that the law in general needs to be tightened up and strengthened. The current moratorium expires this May.

MORE NEWS FROM RENO...

County authorities have cited National Outdoor twice this year with illegally making changes to signs along highway approaches to Reno during the billboard moratorium. This according to a spokesperson in the Washoe

County District Attorney's Office.

The first incident involved the billboard company adding a second face to a billboard along Interstate 80 at approximately 8 PM on a summer evening without obtaining a building permit. The second citation was issued after a National Outdoor non-conforming billboard was severely damaged by high winds in October. The county sign ordinance forbids non-conforming signs damaged beyond a certain percentage to be rebuilt. County officials told SCN that National did not bother to apply for a building permit this time either--they just charged out to the site and began rebuilding the sign.



Many communities are upset about billboards close to residential areas. Reno is one of them.

GRAND PRAIRIE LAW LIMITS PORTABLE SIGNS

A provision in Grand Prairie, Texas' newly revised sign ordinance is being studied by other communities. The town council passed the new ordinance January 21 after nine months of analysis and drafting by a citizens sign committee. The provision dealing with portable signs has caused the most interest. The ordinance allows portable signs to be displayed

for up to eight weeks each year, but every two weeks the owner must pay an enforcement fee. K.K. Gerhart-Fritz of the Grand Prairie Planning Office says this tends to shorten the appearance of these signs.

The revised Grand Prairie ordinance also reduces the size of signs and increases billboard fees to \$100 annually.

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billboards along primary highways; and increase billboard permit renewal fees from \$30 to \$50. This money will be used to remove billboards and landscape highways.

In announcing the new proposal, the Chattanooga Free Press reported the Governor as saying, "Billboard companies have gone overboard. Today over 10,000 billboards detract from Tennessee's scenic beauty. This new legislation would be a giant step forward in our fight to keep Tennessee the beautiful state we always have been proud of. The tourists will thank us too."

Logo Signs

One of the key provisions of the governor's proposal is the institution of a statewide logo sign system. "We're all for logo signs," said Marie Compere of the Knoxville Green Association. The logo sign program would allow roadside businesses to advertise on standardized signs on the highway right of way. Besides providing motorist information, logo signs are a boon to small businesses. The Governor pointed out that a logo sign would cost a business about \$800 per year, whereas billboard companies frequently charge as much as \$20,000 a year to provide the same information.

Reaction to the Governor's proposal was dramatic. Citizen groups, conservationists, businesspeople, letters to the editor, and newspaper editorials all praised the Governor's proposal. "A big loud hurrah for Governor Alexander for his honest recognition of billboard pollution," wrote one Tennessean. "Uncovering Tennessee the Beautiful," wrote another. "Clean-up Highway Eye Pollution," demanded a third.

Industry reaction however was quite different. Hordes of industry lobbyists, public relations experts, and industry executives decended on Nashville to oppose the Governor's proposals.

Elsewhere across Tennessee, numerous cities and towns took up the issue by taking a look at their own local sign ordinances. A number of towns even passed billboard moratoriums to give themselves time to review their laws.

Whatever the outcome of the Tennessee proposals, it is dramatic evidence of the growing nationwide movement to halt the spread of visual pollution and to save the scenery of our country.

ARIZONA

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by saying, "Sign control is becoming a very chic political issue in the Eighties here."

EDITORIAL COMMENT: In recent years there has been a nationwide trend for cities to ban the construction of all new billboards. Whether your city has 5,000 billboards or none, you can at least insure that billboard pollution doesn't get worse. A permanent moratorium on the erection of new billboards will not improve your city's appearance overnight, but it will prevent the problem from spreading. For more information about billboard moratoriums and other measures which place sensible limits on billboards contact the Coalition for Scenic Beauty.

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previous spacing requirements. There is also a new height limit of 42 1/2 feet and a maximum face size of 650 square feet--versus a previous limit of 1,200 square feet.

Anti-billboard activists greeted the action with praise. "We feel that the new regulations are terrific!" Rita Ellison of Billboards Limited told SCN. "We feel this is a giant step toward improving the roadways of Texas. We need to improve the visual image of Texas in order to attract...quality businesses."

Ellison predicted that one specific regulation will half the number of eligible sites for billboard construction. "The Commissioner said that rather than require just one adjacent commercial or industrial establishment to create a billboard construction zone, two or more will now be required.

State Representative Bill Messer (D-Belton) echoed these views when he declared "There

INDUSTRY BILL

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The amendments would prohibit any unit of government from removing billboards on public land. If a billboard absolutely had to be removed, for example to widen a highway, then taxpayers would be forced to pay relocation assistance so that the billboard could be relocated somewhere else.

These irresponsible amendments would further weaken efforts to clean-up billboard pollution along our nation's highways. Please write to your Congressman urging them to wipe these amendments out of the Highway Bill.

are going to be fewer [new] signs, especially in metropolitan areas, and this is going to spread them out a lot more."

The Commission's decision came despite heavy pressure from the billboard lobby. The President of the Outdoor Advertising Association, Vernon Clark, even made an appearance before the Commission, saying that the regulations would make Texas the strictest regulator in the country.

"That's just not true," countered Rita Ellison, saying that many states have stricter sign regulations than Texas. She told SCN that Clark's remark was indicative of the misleading claims made by the industry. In the end, the Commission recognized that like all other forms of pollution, billboards need regulating.

DORCHESTER COUNTY, SC IMPOSES MORATORIUM

By a 4-1 vote, the Dorchester County Council imposed a 180 day moratorium on permits to erect signs and billboards in this South Carolina County. The Charlestown News and Courier reports that Wayne H. Reeves, chair of the Council's Planning and Development Committee, said he believes there are already too many signs in the county. "Just like everybody else, we're getting so cluttered with signs," he said. "We were ending up with signs in the subdivisions." The county will study its current sign ordinance while the ban is in effect.

Write a letter to Congress...
see back page

WRITING LETTERS TO CONGRESS

Don't underestimate the power a letter to your elected officials will have on Capitol Hill. If you are unaware of who your current legislators are, place a call to your public library or City Hall. Then address your letters to:

Senator
Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative
House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The legislators that will decide the initial fate of the current billboard legislation

SENATE ENVIRONMENT & PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE:

Stafford (R-VT) (Chair)
Chafee (R-RI)
Simpson (R-WY)
Abdnor (R-SD)
Symms (R-WY)
Humphrey (R-NH)
Domenici (R-NM)
Durenberger (R-MN)
Bentsen (D-TX)
Burdick (D-ND)
Hart (D-CO)
Moynihan (D-NY)
Mitchell (D-ME)
Baucus (D-MT)
Lautenberg (D-NJ)

Howard (D-NJ) (Chair)
Anderson (D-CA)
Roe (D-NJ)
Breauk (D-LA)
Mineta (D-CA)
Oberstar (D-MN)
Nowak (D-NY)
Edgar (D-PA)
Young (D-MO)
Rahall (D-WV)
Applegate (D-OH)
de Lugo (D-VI)
Savage (D-IL)
Sunia (D-AS)
Bosco (D-CA)
Moody (D-WI)
Borski (D-PA)
Kolter (D-PA)
Valentine (D-NC)
Towns (D-NY)
Lipinski (D-IL)
Andrews (D-TX)
Rowland (D-GA)

HOUSE PUBLIC WORKS & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE:

Wise (D-WV)
Gray (D-IL)
Atkins (D-MA)
Visclosky (D-IN)
Trafficant (D-OH)
Perkins (D-KY)
Snyder (R-KY)
Hammer Schmidt (R-AR)
Shuster (R-PA)
Stangeland (R-MN)
Gingrich (R-GA)
Clinger (R-PA)
Molinar (R-NY)
Shaw (R-FL)
McEwen (R-OH)
Petr (R-WI)
Sundquist (R-TN)
Johnson (R-CT)
Packard (R-CT)
Boehler (R-NY)
Delay (R-TX)
Gallo (R-NJ)
Lightfoot (R-IA)

In your letter, remember to ask their position on billboard control and how they feel about SB 1494 (the Gorton Bill). Don't forget to tell them how the current Highway Beautification Act is being implemented in your state. Tell them how billboard blight is hurting your community.

sit on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and the House Transportation and Public Works Committee. You may want to write to them, especially if they are in your state.

Sign Control News is published by the Center for Sign Control, a project of the Coalition for Scenic Beauty. The center provides research, information, and counsel to associate members interested in improving the quality of America's urban and rural environments through the control of signs and billboards. Sign Control News is available free to members of the Coalition for Scenic Beauty. Coalition membership fees are as follows: Individual memberships start at \$20; for clubs, associations, organizations, private businesses, or government agencies fees are \$50 for local organizations, \$100 for state or regional organizations, and \$150 for national organizations. To join, send check payable to the "Coalition for Scenic Beauty" to Coalition for Scenic Beauty, 44 East Front St., Media, PA 19063. Phone: (215) 565-9131.