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Scenic Quote of the Month

"Is 200 billboards between St. Paul and St. Cloud not enough? It could be 2,000 if nothing is done to stop it. At some point, you will see nothing but billboards between here and St. Cloud."

~ Minn. state Rep. Joe Opatz in 1999, speaking in support of legislation to allow for the removal of billboards through amortization.

Scenic America featured at public forum on digital billboards in Omaha

The national debate about digital billboards has reached Omaha, Neb., where Lan Advertising recently erected five digital billboards without permits, claiming the new technology was merely a change of the sign face and didn't require permission.

The city is currently sorting out its response and is in the process of developing new rules to govern electronic billboards. To encourage wider citizen debate, [Omaha by Design](#), an organization dedicated to civic involvement and public-private initiatives to improve the city's built and natural

environments, recently sponsored a public forum on digital billboards. Scenic America president Kevin Fry was the featured speaker and he laid out the argument against the signs.

Fry reminded the audience that digital billboards, because of their intense brightness (especially at night) and constantly changing complex messages, pose significant aesthetic and traffic safety issues. "Omaha should know," he said, "that by allowing these signs along its roadways the community is surrendering its visual environment to giant glowing television screens, to the detriment of nearby businesses, neighborhoods, and landmarks which can't hope to compete for attention."

Fry also spelled out the myriad safety issues posed by digital signage. "By their very nature, electronic billboards cannot simultaneously be safe for motorists and be effective as advertising. Just like cigarettes, they're dangerous to your health if used as intended," he said.

More information about Scenic America's position on digital billboards can be [found here](#).

Scenic Houston celebrates takedown of milestone billboard

[Scenic Houston](#) recently joined Mayor Bill White in marking the removal of one of 821 billboards slated to be removed from that city's streets. This was the 100th billboard removed as part of an agreement that Scenic Houston helped negotiate between the city and Clear Channel Outdoor.

After more than two years of negotiations, the city passed an ordinance in April 2008 to remove the billboard structures by January 2009.



Downtown Omaha - photo by Brian Sullivan

Scenic Trivia Question

Q: Did the number of billboards along U.S. roads increase or decrease after passage of the Highway Beautification Act?

A: According to a Scenic America study, there were roughly 450,000 billboards nationwide in April 1997, a 50% increase from the 300,000 standing when President Johnson signed the law in 1965.

"Removing hundreds of billboards that have blighted our streets and neighborhoods for decades is a real win for the citizens of Houston, and a tremendous quality of life accomplishment," said Olga L. Moya, president of Scenic Houston.

Scenic Texas and Scenic Houston staff provided critical support for this effort, as did Florida-based attorney Bill Brinton, a Scenic America board member and renowned expert on sign code and land use law.



Houston Mayor Bill White, Scenic Houston President Olga Moya, and Scenic Houston Executive Director Anne Culver marking the removal of one of 821 billboards scheduled to be taken down from Houston streets.

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The 821 signs to be removed under the agreement include all of Clear Channel's so-called "small" billboard structures and many of its medium-sized billboard structures. More than 50 billboards will be removed from designated scenic districts. [Click here to download the city's press release](#) marking the removal of the 100th sign.

Los Angeles sign activists featured on television news program

Ever since *LA Weekly* published [this blistering expose](#) on billboard corruption in that city several months ago, the issue of illegal signs has taken on a new urgency in the public dialogue in Los Angeles.

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In 2002, the L.A. City Council voted to ban new billboards and implement an inventory and inspection program to find and remove those that were put up illegally. The inventory and inspection program still hasn't been implemented, and by all estimates, there are now far more billboards in L.A. than there were six years ago.

Locally, the loudest voice against illegal signs in Los Angeles is coming from the non-profit Coalition to Ban Billboard Blight (CBBB). On a recent episode of the television program *Insider Exclusive*, Dennis Hathaway from the CBBB spoke to host Steve Murphy about L.A.'s billboard problems. [Click here](#) to watch the interview.



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Scenic news from around the nation

Tucson-area billboards continue to dwindle: Four more billboards have come down near Tucson, Arizona recently as part of a long-standing settlement with Clear Channel Outdoor. 66 billboards have been removed from the greater Tucson area in the past two years, reducing the total number within Pima County from 585 to 525.

Byway proposal gears up in New Jersey: The newly formed I-78 Corridor Historic and Scenic Byway Alliance announces the creation of [their new web site](#). The group, composed of public and private partners, works to promote the proposed I-78 Historic and Scenic Corridor in west central New Jersey.

Kentucky governor says no to digital billboards: Kentucky Gov.

Steve Beshear has ordered that a major proposed change in billboard regulations in that state [be withdrawn](#) because of safety concerns. This, coupled with similar recent action by the state of Montana, demonstrates that prudent state and local governments are willing to put the safety of their citizens first and ban digital billboards until conclusive safety studies, such as the Federal Highway Administration study currently underway, are completed and published.

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