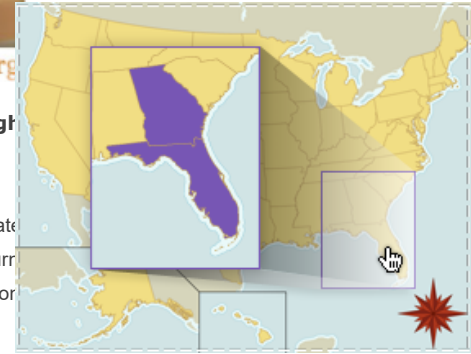




September 2008

Get Local



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California considers selling ads on official traffic signs in the right of way

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is considering a plan to turn that state's traffic signs on the right of way over to Clear Channel Outdoor, which would in turn convert the signs into digital billboards capable of displaying advertising in addition to official messages.

In Scenic America's view, this proposal is completely illegal, and is actually similar in many ways to the recently proposed vegetative logo program that quietly died in Congress last year, and which may be back.

It is our opinion that this proposal violates the law in several ways. First, the right of way cannot be commercialized under federal law. This plan also violates provisions of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which regulates signage on the nation's roads, and the Highway Beautification Act, which prohibits billboards on the right of way.



Official message board in the Bay Area - photo by Michael Patrick

There is also the issue of the state granting an exclusive contract to a single company to exploit its own signs, which have a privileged location on the highway, while denying other companies the right to erect signs on the right of way themselves. This exclusivity raises the potential to undermine the state's outdoor advertising laws.

There are also, of course, enormous inherent traffic safety issues with digital signs directly on the right of way. First, these signs occupy a privileged and highly conspicuous location in the driving environment, and putting complex commercial advertising on these signs would be devastatingly distracting. Second, if the driving public begins to perceive that these signs are merely commercial message boards, they may start to tune them out and therefore miss, or be confused about the legitimacy of, official messages on the signs.

For these reasons and more, Scenic America is strongly opposed to this plan. We will be monitoring the situation closely and working hard to make sure the safety of the motoring public in California is not compromised in exchange for a few extra dollars in that state's coffers.

[Click here to download](#) Scenic America's position paper (PDF) on California's proposed plan to allow ads on traffic signs in the right of way.

Scenic America makes the news:

[Some Houston billboards will stay down after Ike](#)

[Digital billboards spur conflict in St. Louis](#)

[More lit-up freeway ads a sign of the times in California](#)

[California considers selling ads on signs used for Amber Alerts](#)

[Are those flashy new electronic signs also a safety hazard?](#)

Scenic Quote of the Month

"If we need to do this to get

Scenic America looks at the "view from the road" with community leaders

money, maybe the state should go ahead and open a brothel."

~ Ted Wu of the Coalition to Ban Billboard Blight, reacting to California's proposal to sell advertising on digital signs in the right-of-way on that state's roads.

"The visual character of our roadways has an enormous impact on the visual character of our communities, and cannot be ignored."

That was the message sent by Scenic America president Kevin Fry to community leaders and decision-makers from Fauquier and Prince William Counties, Va., at a Community & Countryside workshop, held recently in Warrenton, Va.



Old country road in rural Virginia - photo by Ken Garrett

Scenic Trivia Question

Q: The billboard industry says billboards provide essential information to the motoring public. Do drivers agree?

A: According to a 1990 study in Rhode Island, 72% of those surveyed responded that they received either very little or no useful information about products and services from billboards.

The two-day educational workshop, sponsored by the [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#) and the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership, was designed to provide local citizens and officials with tools to respond to and anticipate local growth in ways that can conserve and enhance the historic, natural, and scenic assets of their communities. Fry was one of several speakers who took part in the discussions and presentations dealing with the special challenges confronting communities along the historic corridor called the [Journey Through Hallowed Ground](#), which extends from Gettysburg, Pa., to Monticello in Charlottesville, Va.

In addition to describing the range of scenic conservation issues that deserve attention, including the preservation of open space, the implementation of effective sign controls, the value of mitigating the visual intrusions inherent in cell towers and overhead power lines, the importance of tree ordinances, and other policy actions, Fry called for the full integration of context-sensitive transportation principles along the corridor.

Fry reminded the community leaders that "in our modern world our experience of place is often largely from the roadway," and that "the view from the road should never be neglected."

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"We have to care about these things," he said, "because these are issues not just of policy, politics, regulation, land use rules, or property rights, they are matters that affect the quality and nature of our lives in ways that we may not even be aware of. Visual quality matters in profound ways, and must always be protected."

Tree-cutting gets national attention

A report by [David Barron](#) on [National Public Radio](#) examines an issue Scenic America has been working on for years: the battle between communities who want to plant and maintain trees and the billboard companies who want motorists to have unadulterated views of their signs.


While the practice of billboard companies destroying the public's trees is an issue all across the country, in this story Barron focuses on a swath of trees on a highway near Orlando, Florida. The piece includes commentary from Bill Jonson, a Scenic America board member and President of [Citizens for a Scenic Florida](#).

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Click here to listen to the report.

Change is Inevitable, Ugliness is Not!

 [Beauty and the Beast](#) More information on the practice of tree cutting around billboards can be found [here on our website](#).



In addition, our recent publication *Beauty and the Beast* is available as a [free PDF download](#). The publication examines how the billboard industry makes money by chopping down the public's trees, why states let them do it, and how you can stop it.

Contact Us

Federal Highway Administration seeks Byways nominations

Scenic America
1250 I Street NW
Suite 750
Washington, DC 20005

202.638.0550 ph
202.638.3171 fax
www.scenic.org

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is announcing the sixth [National Scenic Byways Program](#) nomination cycle.

In order to qualify for designation as a National Scenic Byway or an All-American Road. However, the byway must have a corridor management plan and the nomination must be submitted through a State's identified scenic byway agency, an Indian tribe, or a Federal land management agency. In most States, the Department of Transportation serves as the scenic byway agency.

A hard copy of the completed nomination and online forms are due from the State, Indian tribe, or Federal land management agency to the FHWA Division Offices by December 17, 2008.

More information can be found on the [nomination section](#) of FHWA's Web site. If you have questions about nominating a road for possible designation as a National Scenic Byway or an All-American Road, feel free to contact either Cindi Ptak at 202-366-1586 or cindi.ptak@dot.gov or Gary Jensen at 202-366-2048 or gary.jensen@dot.gov.

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Rangeley Lakes Scenic
Byway winds around
Beaver Pond - photo
courtesy Maine DOT