

Scenic America

Billboard Fact Sheet

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ABOUT THE BILLBOARD INDUSTRY

The outdoor advertising industry is a powerful force that generated more than **\$8.6 billion** in revenue in 2019. The industry works to influence sign codes and ordinances at the community, county, and state level in order to grow its profitability at the expense of scenic beauty, public safety, and environmental concerns.

HOW MANY BILLBOARDS ARE THERE IN THE U.S.?

In its 2021 research, Scenic America found **439,711** billboard sign faces across the country, and as many as 20% of these may be nonpermitted, nonconforming, or illegally modified.

The Out of Home Advertising Association of America estimates that there were **10,100 digital billboards** in the U.S. in 2020. Each digital billboard may display up to ten messages in rotation, accounting for thousands more advertising impressions than a traditional static billboard.

QUICK FACTS

- > Outdoor advertising brought in \$8.6 B in revenue (2019)
- > Nearly 440,000 billboard faces across the U.S.
- > 10,100 digital billboards
- > Dominated by 5 key players: Lamar Advertising, Outfront Media, Clear Channel Outdoor, Adams Outdoor, Reagan Outdoor
- > Top users of billboard advertising in 2020 included McDonald's, Apple, Geico, Amazon, HBO, Coca-Cola, Allstate, Anheuser-Busch, Comcast, and American Express.

WHO REGULATES BILLBOARDS?

Billboards that are located within 660 feet of federal-aid roads are regulated under the Highway Beautification Act (HBA) of 1965. The HBA:

- Requires states to maintain “effective control” of outdoor advertising along federal highways or else be subject to a loss of 10 percent of their federal-aid highway fund.
- Prohibits billboards in areas with non-commercial activity
- Prohibits new billboards that don't conform to certain size, spacing and lighting requirements.

Billboards that are not located along federal-aid roads are regulated by local sign ordinances.

ARE DIGITAL BILLBOARDS DANGEROUS?

Research demonstrates that digital billboards pose a threat to safety by distracting drivers. Findings include:

- A 2015 study on high-speed roads in Alabama and Florida found crash rates 25%-29% higher near digital signs.
- In 2012, the Swedish government ordered the removal of digital signs after a study found significant evidence of distracted driving.
- The National Highway Traffic Safety administration found that taking one's eyes off the road for 2+ seconds significantly increased the risk of crashes.
- **Additional studies are posted at scenic.org/compendium.**

HOW DO BILLBOARDS IMPACT THE ENVIRONMENT?

Negative impacts on the environment include:

- **Tree cutting:** 32 states allow billboard companies to remove highway buffer trees to make their signs more visible.
- **Energy use:** One 10 x 30-foot digital sign may use up to 20,440 kilowatt-hours of energy per year. The average household uses 6,000 kwh per year.
- **Light pollution:** Signs disrupt circadian rhythms, negatively impacting human health and wildlife.



HOW DO BILLBOARDS IMPACT PROPERTY VALUES?

A 2011 University of Pennsylvania study, [Beyond Aesthetics](#), showed that homes located within 500 feet of a billboard are worth \$31,000 less at time of sale than those located further away. In addition, every billboard in a census tract correlated with a nearly \$1,000 depreciation in home value compared to the city average. The presence of billboards reduces local property tax bases. Attempts by town and county governments to recoup these costs through permit fees and taxes on billboards never succeed in offsetting the lost value.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CITIES CONVERT STATIC BILLBOARDS TO DIGITAL BILLBOARDS?

Advertising companies often make agreements to take some traditional billboards to put up digital billboards, which are more profitable, and which may be more difficult to construct in new locations due to signage ordinances. Communities who wish to engage in such negotiations should press for the largest possible ratio. For example, Kansas City considered a proposal for a 7:1 conversion agreement. Tampa had a 10:1 ratio.

BILLBOARDS ARE PROHIBITED IN FOUR STATES & 700+ COMMUNITIES

Hawaii, Alaska, Vermont & Maine prohibit billboards, along with major cities like Los Angeles, Houston, and St. Paul.

MAY MY CITY PROHIBIT NEW BILLBOARDS OR DIGITAL CONVERSIONS?

Most likely, yes. Decades of case law has affirmed the rights of communities to prohibit construction of billboards for safety and aesthetic concerns.

Scenic America and its chapters and affiliates stand ready to assist citizen activists who are concerned with billboards, digital signs, and other types of scenic blight in their communities. We assist with research, public comments and testimonies, advocacy campaigns and public outreach support, at no cost to you.

Visit SCENIC.ORG for more information or contact us at scenic@scenic.org for assistance with your issue.

Scenic America

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