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Digital Billboards: Agents for Safety



The nation’s highway safety agency recently featured a digital billboard on the cover of its newsletter, heralding winners of its contest to design safe-driving messages on billboards (Project Yellow Light).



The Daily Communicator

Detailees sought for Special Assistant positions

A [detail opportunity has been posted](#) for multiple Special Assistants for the Office of the Deputy Administrator. This is open for DOT HQ employees and closes June 21.



>> *Project Yellow Light scholarship contest winners were announced on a digital billboard in New York's Times Square earlier this month. The contest calls on high school and college students to create a TV, radio or billboard Public Service Advertisement to educate their peers about the dangers of using mobile devices behind the wheel of a vehicle. [Details](#)*

Deputy King's Blog

How do we get communities involved on recalls and help save more lives?

Community efforts will become an increasingly important part of trying to repair vehicles recalled because of deadly Takata air bags. Maybe you have ideas. [Check it out](#)

'Improve safety, but don't stifle innovation'

Coverage of Deputy King's speech at ITS America highlights her messaging theme, and that technology must be embraced. [Details](#)

Check out our Information Center

The [Information Center](#) is a resource to share NHTSA news, as well as business tools like the [new PowerPoint template](#). Take

Yes, digital billboards have become a communications platform for the sake of safety (safe driving and overall safety of communities).

Accepted, regulated, and safe, digital billboards have been deployed for nearly two decades. We thought it would be instructive — and historically interesting — to chart the history of digital billboards and traffic safety.



The industry went further, tasking outside experts to analyze accident records in five different markets. Reams of data showed that digital billboards did not have a statistical relationship with accidents.

Healthy skepticism greets most industry-sponsored research. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) launched its own study, enlisting the respected global engineering firm SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation) to help analyze drivers' eye glances.

Using the latest equipment to monitor eye movements, the **federal study** (released in late 2013) concluded that glances in the direction of digital billboards were well under the distraction threshold set earlier via comprehensive federal research.

What Do the Feds Say about Safety?

A citizen from Georgia asked federal authorities about digital billboards and safety. Here's the response she received:

From: Lori Millen <Lori.Millen@dot.gov>
Date: Wednesday, November 23, 2016 at 2:41 PM
To: "info@stopjcbillboards.org" <info@stopjcbillboards.org>
Subject: Johns Creek Billboards

Dear Ms. Murphy:

Thank you for sharing your concerns about the *Stop the Texts. Stop the Wrecks.* digital billboards in Johns Creek, GA. Your emails to TSM, Susan McMeen, and NHTSA's Region 4 office were forwarded to me for a response.

Please be advised that the US Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) contracted the Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to study the effects of digital billboards on driver attention and distraction in 2007. This study, which was based on how long drivers took their eyes off the road when in the presence of digital billboards, was conducted to determine if digital billboards posed an unsafe driver distraction. The study was completed in early 2010, and a draft report was subjected to peer review in 2012.

On December 30, 2013, FHWA released its final report that included the following findings:



Virginia Technical Transportation Institute (VTTI).

- The longest fixation to a digital billboard was 1.34 seconds, and to a standard billboard, it was 1.28 seconds, both of which are well below the accepted standard.

The results of this study are consistent with a wealth of research that has been conducted on vision in natural environments. In the driving environment, gaze allocation is principally controlled by the requirements of the task. The present data suggest that the drivers in this study directed the majority of their visual attention to areas of the roadway that were relevant to the task at hand (i.e., the driving task). Furthermore, it is possible, and likely, that in the time that the drivers looked away from the forward roadway, they may have elected to glance at other objects in the surrounding environment (in the absence of billboards) that were not relevant to the driving task. When billboards were present, the drivers in this study sometimes looked at them, but not such that overall attention to the forward roadway decreased.

FHWA has authority over issues relating to outdoor signage. If you have any additional questions or concerns, I would encourage you to contact Melissa Corder at melissa.corder@dot.gov. She can provide you with more detailed information about the FHWA studies.

I hope this information has been helpful to you, and thank you for your interest in highway safety.

Sincerely,

*Lori Gabrielle Millen, Marketing Specialist
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Government Relies on Digital Billboards for Safety

In April, the [FBI gave a director's award to Clear Channel-Las Vegas](#) for helping law enforcement after the mass shooting. For more than a decade, the FBI and other law enforcement have used digital billboards to empower the public on behalf of safety.

In 2010, pro-Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood launched high-visibility enforcement projects in two test markets to reduce distracted driving (Hartford and Syracuse). After four waves of intense enforcement and public education, including public service messages on digital billboards in Hartford,



Last month, the City of Albuquerque (NM) enacted a program to **display real-time emergency alerts** on 44 digital billboards across the region. Similar partnerships have been enacted by other cities and several states.

The government's top emergency manager described digital billboards like this: "Use of digital signage along highways is part of the layering and unity of messaging to reach affected communities, and supplements radio and mobile alerts," said **William B. "Brock" Long**, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Those who operate digital billboards are proud of their safety record, and their ability to advance public safety.



OAAA balances and serves the interests of all members, and provides the tools, resources and support members need to win in the marketplace.

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