

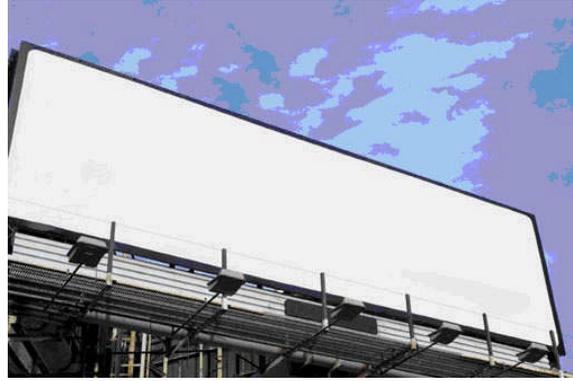
## Signs of the Time Assessment

August 2006 - January 2007

**Location:** National

### Background

Billboards are a familiar sight on many highways across the United States. The federal Outdoor Advertising Control (OAC) Program was set up to provide rules concerning outdoor signage on federal-aid highways, such as Interstates. How billboards and signs are regulated has been an increasing source of controversy since 1965 when the Highway Beautification Act (HBA) was passed. Billboard companies, advocates for scenic beauty, landowners, government officials, and the traveling public are all affected. Some believe that the OAC Program is unfair to business interests. Others believe that restrictions authorized by the HBA to protect scenic views have not been enforced. Many contend that the OAC Program doesn't address new billboard technology. As a result of the mounting controversy, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) asked the Institute to conduct an assessment of the OAC Program. The goal of the assessment was to gain a better understanding of the issues, engage in dialogue with all the people and groups involved, and identify opportunities for collaborative problem-solving.



### Results and Accomplishments

The assessment report identified a number of issues, described points of view, identified options for resolving a number of controversial issues and created momentum for issue resolution. Some issues were identified as appropriate for collaborative problem-solving among concerned parties, including new sign technology, non-conforming signs, and vegetation-clearing around billboards. Two important steps have been taken since the report was issued. The FHWA issued guidance and is undertaking research related to digital billboards. Plans are also underway to engage in a collaborative process with interested stakeholders to address a specific non-conforming signs issue and to identify opportunities to work collaboratively on the new technologies research.

### Highlights

A group of representatives from each of the interested parties was assembled to help plan the assessment. The group selected the assessors (the Osprey Group) and helped develop the approach. Public meetings, focus groups and private interviews were held in seven cities where outdoor advertising is controversial. In all, 153 individuals participated directly and more than 1,800 opinions from the public were posted in the Federal Register. This combination of methods proved highly effective in reaching a broad audience and in shaping the final report. The assessment report was delivered to those who participated in the assessment. FHWA then published it in the Federal Register and requested comments.

### Credits

**Partner from National Roster of ECR Practitioners**  
Dennis Donald and John Huyler, The Osprey Group

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