

**From:** Melinda Cotton  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 04, 2019 10:27 AM  
**To:** Linda Tatum; Christopher Koontz; Dionne Bearden  
**Subject:** Dangerous & Unsightly - "Electronic Message Centers" (i.e. Billboards) facing 2nd Street & PCH - Planning Commission, Thursday, Sept. 5, Item 1 - 19-067PL

Dear Planning Commission Chair Richard Lewis, Vice Chair Mark Christoffels and Commissioners:

**"The Dangerous Distraction of Digital Billboards"** says it all. Please read the article below. The 2nd & PCH intersection is already the most crowded, and distracting intersection in our City. "Electronic Message Centers" (i.e. Billboards) 378 sq. ft. and 80 ft. in size facing a major highway, and a major through street with constantly changing text and pictures will further distract already frustrated drivers, and likely lead to accidents. Please vote NO on these "Electronic Message Centers" (i.e. Billboards) [Item 1 - 19-067PL]

Sincerely,  
 Melinda Cotton, Belmont Shore

## The Dangerous Distraction of Digital Billboards

By [Melissa Thompson](#). NewsBlaze  
 January 11, 2018



Advertisers know it's important to capture people's attention to make an impact, but when it comes to taking people's attention away from driving, the impact could come in the form of a high-speed crash.

Unlike traditional billboards, which are simply large painted boards, digital billboards can change their bright and colorful images every few seconds. This makes the digital billboard flashy and interesting to the traffic passing by, not unlike a huge big-screen television along the side of the road, but is it too eye-catching for safety?

The scientific proof is still disputed, but marketers ought to be aware of the potentially deadly consequences of digital billboards as an advertising channel. To inform marketers who may be considering digital billboards going forward, here are some studies and their findings regarding safety.

### **Virginia Tech study**

The Transportation Institute at Virginia Tech published a fact sheet based on their 2006 study of car accidents and near-collisions. They used a number of monitoring instruments in each car, including five channels of digital video, front and rear radar sensors, accelerometers and vision-based lane trackers, to capture about a year's worth of data on 100 different cars used for general-purpose driving.

They found that nearly 80% of crashes, and 65% of near-crashes, occurred due to driver inattention such as distraction or simply looking away for three seconds. When it comes to rear-end striking crashes, inattention was a contributing factor in 93% of cases. Interestingly, the rate of crash and near-crash incidents due to inattention decreased with age, with the 18-20-year-old age group four times higher than older age groups such as 35+ years of age.

This well-respected study shows that only a couple seconds of inattention can easily lead to auto accidents.

### **ODOT study**

In this early [study](#) of digital billboard safety in 2008 by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), brought about when Salem, Oregon introduced four digital billboards to a major arterial thoroughfare, ODOT reviewed the existing literature and found that further research was needed.

One noteworthy point ODOT raised in this brief report is that the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, which was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson after having been led by the efforts of his wife Lady Bird Johnson, was based partially on concerns about driver distraction by billboards. "Advertising that could distract or impair the driver's vision was removed from highways under the Highway Beautification Act of 1965."

### **Swedish study**

In 2012, Swedish researchers published their [study](#) on the effects of electronic billboards regarding driver distraction in the journal *Traffic Injury Prevention*. This study showed that drivers looked at digital billboards significantly longer than conventional ones. The results read, "The visual behaviour data showed that drivers had a significantly longer dwell time, a greater number of fixations and longer maximum fixation duration when driving past an electronic billboard compared to other signs on the same road stretches."

The digital signs often took the drivers' attention away from the road for more than two seconds, which compares to the duration of inattention leading to crashes in the Virginia Tech study noted above.

As a result of this study, the Swedish government outlawed the use of digital billboards and ordered the removal of all the digital billboards they had authorized since introduction in 2009.

### **FHWA study**

In 2013, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued the results of its digital billboard safety [study](#), concluding that they were not a danger to traffic safety.

However, a peer-reviewed [critique](#) of the FHWA study later reported a number of problems with its methodology. The researchers were not familiar with the proper operation of their test equipment, the tested digital billboards were not as bright as those studied elsewhere, they only tested a handful of billboards, and the final report contained unexplained differences from earlier drafts. All of this, they say, makes the FHWA study conclusions highly suspect.

### **New England study**

A 2016 [paper](#) published in *Accident Analysis and Prevention* by the New England University Transportation Center & MIT AgeLab reported an increase in number and duration of glances at digital billboards compared to regular billboards, and those glances were correlated with the times when those billboard images switched.

Led by a psychologist, this paper explains that flashy images evoke "obligatory shifts of covert visual attention" that automatically take place in less than 100 milliseconds. The researchers analyzed video from two previous field studies and found that drivers spent significantly less time concentrating on the road as they approached digital billboards.

The researchers admit that the ramifications of driver distraction on safety remain somewhat unclear, noting, “Although these data show a clear change in the distribution of glance behavior around the billboard, it is unclear at this time what, if any, features are safety-relevant.” Nonetheless, they advise that action should be taken to further assess and mitigate the safety impacts of digital billboards.

## **Consequences**

Aside from the risks to human life posed by digital billboards, which should dissuade some conscientious marketers on that basis alone, it’s possible that legal ramifications could ensue.

“One lawsuit recovered \$1.9 million for a pedestrian struck by a vehicle while working on the roadside,” says Jason Hennessey, marketing consultant for [Atlanta Car Accident Lawyer](#). “The stakes are extremely high for the parties found responsible for distracting drivers.”

Furthermore, as public awareness grows about these safety issues, companies using digital billboards may experience damage to their reputations for partaking in the questionable practice.

Perhaps, with the advent of self-driving cars, accidents due to distracted drivers will be [eliminated](#) and all vehicle occupants will be able to fully amuse themselves safely in looking at all the digital billboards decorating the roadside.

In any case, in this age of constant and rapid technological innovation, marketers need to choose their advertising media wisely. Effectiveness and return on investment are key factors in evaluating new advertising technologies, but as these studies show, there are some audiences whose attention you should not seek to capture.



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**From:** Linda Pemberton <  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 05, 2019 9:26 AM  
**To:** Linda Tatum; Christopher Koontz; Dionne Bearden  
**Subject:** Dangerous & Unsightly - "Electronic Message Centers" facing 2nd Street & PCH - Planning Commission, Thursday, Sept. 5, Item 1 - 19-067PL

**Dear Planning Commissioners,**

**Please do not approve the massive and highly distracting electronic message boards that will face 2nd Street and PCH.**

**Safety is Sacrificed for Retail Sales**

These are large and flashy electronic messages boards. They are dangerous, especially placed in one of the worst-rated traffic intersections in the city. They do not provide any benefit for the community, they are detrimental to the community.

Their use will slow traffic, distracted drivers and cause accidents between cars, bike riders and pedestrians, all trying to share this busy and already dangerous intersection.

**Visual Blight and Ad Harassment is not a good exchange for Retail Sales**

These proposed message boards are abusive visual pollution. Why should a traveler going through this intersection be unwillingly bombarded with in-your-face product and life-style advertisements? The size and other signage on this new retail establishment is compelling enough to reach customers. The external-facing, electronic message boards are over the top. People go to great lengths to avoid the extensive load of advertising in our environment, paying extra for commercial free media, technology that blocks robo calls, technology that allows a viewer to skip commercials. They are not going to be happy with an added layer of unnecessary, outlandish, visual assault. How many of you like the gas stations with monitors at the pump that sell to you while you are getting gas? I avoid them.

**Changing the Sense of Place - From Coastal Calm to Vegas**

Use of these electronic message boards completely changes the "sense of place" in this area. We are not Las Vegas. We don't need to scream out to people with flashing lights and oversized moving visuals. Use of these outdoor, traffic facing message boards will give a greedy, desperate, sleazy feel to the area. People come to the coast to relax and enjoy a sense of nature. They look forward to a more laid back environment. This is in direct conflict with that sensibility.

**Public Hearing Notice - Lacking**

I am on a number of mailing lists for City announcements and look regularly for items of change and development, especially in the Southeast area of Long Beach.

I did not see any of the 324 Public Hearing notices distributed on August 19th.

Thank you,

Linda Pemberton  
Belmont Heights



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**To:** Linda Tatum  
**Subject:** RE: "Electronic Message Centers" (i.e. Billboards) facing 2nd Street & PCH - Planning Commission, Thursday, Sept. 5, Item 1 - 19-067PL

-----Original Message-----

From: Dianne Sundstrom  
Sent: Thursday, September 05, 2019 11:43 AM  
To: Linda Tatum <Linda.Tatum@longbeach.gov>; Christopher Koontz <Christopher.Koontz@longbeach.gov>; Dionne Bearden <Dionne.Bearden@longbeach.gov>  
Subject: "Electronic Message Centers" (i.e. Billboards) facing 2nd Street & PCH - Planning Commission, Thursday, Sept. 5, Item 1 - 19-067PL  
Importance: High

Dear Ms. Tatum,

I would like to ask that you forward my message to the Planning Commissioners as I can't find their email contact information on your website. If you could direct me to where those contacts can be found I would be appreciative.

I am asking the Commissioners to vote "NO" on the proposed electronic billboards at the 2nd & PCH development. My primary objection is to those that face the exterior of the development: E1 and E4. Although I personally feel that electronic billboards are unsightly, those that face the interior of the development would be acceptable.

Although the staff report states that there would be no impact on safety relative to driver distraction, there are many studies that would not support that position. Further, this development is adjacent to what we someday hope will be a restored wetlands. Do we really want to look west from those wetlands and see these huge electronic billboards. I think not and expect that if more residents were aware of this proposal they would agree.

The staff report also states that there is no impact on residences. That may be the case at the present time but as SEASIP progresses there are plans for residential units in the vicinity. How will those future residents feel about these billboards?

Regards,

Dianne Sundstrom  
Belmont Heights resident