

FEDERAL-AID POLICY GUIDE
December 9, 1991, Transmittal 1

23 CFR 750G

OPI: HRW-10

SUBCHAPTER H - RIGHT-OF-WAY AND ENVIRONMENT

PART 750 - HIGHWAY BEAUTIFICATION

Subpart F - [Reserved]

Subpart G - Outdoor Advertising Control

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Authority: 23 U.S.C. 131 and 315; 49 CFR 1.48.

Source: 40 FR 42844, Sept. 16, 1975, unless otherwise noted.

Sec. 750.701 Purpose.

This subpart prescribes the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) policies and requirements relating to the effective control of outdoor advertising under 23 U.S.C. 131. The purpose of these policies and requirements is to assure that there is effective State control of outdoor advertising in areas adjacent to Interstate and Federal-aid primary highways. Nothing in this subpart shall be construed to prevent a State from **establishing more stringent outdoor advertising control requirements along Interstate and Primary Systems than provided herein.**

Sec. 750.702 Applicability.

The provisions of this subpart are applicable to all areas adjacent to the Federal-aid Interstate and Primary Systems, including toll sections thereof, except that within urban areas, these provisions **apply only within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way.** These provisions apply regardless of whether Federal funds participated in the costs of such highways. The provisions of this subpart do not apply to the Federal-aid Secondary or Urban Highway System.

Sec. 750.703 Definitions.

The terms as used in this subpart are defined as follows:

- (a) Commercial and industrial zones are those districts established by the zoning authorities as being most appropriate for commerce, industry, or trade, regardless of how labeled. They are commonly categorized as commercial, industrial, business, manufacturing, highway service or highway business (when these latter are intended for highway-oriented business), retail, trade, warehouse, and similar classifications.
- (b) Erect means to construct, build, raise, assemble, place, affix, attach, create, paint, draw, or in any other way bring into being or establish.
- (c) Federal-aid Primary Highway means any highway on the system designated pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 103(b).
- (d) Interstate Highway means any highway on the system defined in and designated, pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 103(e).
- (e) Illegal sign means one which was erected or maintained in violation of State law or local law or ordinance.
- (f) Lease means an agreement, license, permit, or easement, oral or in writing, by which possession or use of land or interests therein is given for a specified purpose, and which is a valid contract under the laws of a State.
- (g) Maintain means to allow to exist.

(h) Main-traveled way means the traveled way of a highway on which through traffic is carried. In the case of a divided highway, the traveled way of each of the separate roadways for traffic in opposite directions is a main-traveled way. It does not include such facilities as frontage roads, turning roadways, or parking areas.

(i) Sign, display or device, hereinafter referred to as "sign," means an outdoor advertising sign, light, display, device, figure, painting, drawing, message, placard, poster, billboard, or other thing which is designed, intended, or used to advertise or inform, any part of the advertising or informative contents of which is visible from any place on the main-traveled way of the Interstate or Primary Systems, whether the same be permanent or portable installation.

(j) State law means a State constitutional provision or statute, or an ordinance, rule or regulation, enacted or adopted by a State.

(k) Unzoned area means an area where there is no zoning in effect. It does not include areas which have a rural zoning classification or land uses established by zoning variances or special exceptions.

(l) Unzoned commercial or industrial areas are unzoned areas actually used for commercial or industrial purposes as defined in the agreements made between the Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation (Secretary), and each State pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 131(d).

(m) Urban area is as defined in 23 U.S.C. 101(a).

(n) Visible means capable of being seen, whether or not readable, without visual aid by a person of normal visual acuity.

Sec. 750.704 Statutory requirements.

(a) 23 U.S.C. 131 provides that signs adjacent to the Interstate and Federal-aid Primary Systems which are visible from the main-traveled way and within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way, and those additional signs beyond 660 feet outside of urban areas which are visible from the main-traveled way and erected with the purpose of their message being read from such main-traveled way, shall be limited to the following:

(1) Directional and official signs and notice which shall conform to national standards promulgated by the Secretary in Subpart B, Part 750, Chapter I, 23 CFR, National Standards for Directional and Official Signs;

(2) Signs advertising the sale or lease of property upon which they are located;

(3) Signs advertising activities conducted on the property on which they are located;

(4) Signs within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way within areas adjacent to the Interstate and Federal-aid Primary Systems which are zoned industrial or commercial under the authority of State law;

(5) Signs within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way within areas adjacent to the Interstate and Federal-aid Primary Systems which are unzoned commercial or industrial areas, which areas are determined by agreement between the State and the Secretary; and

(6) Signs lawfully in existence on October 22, 1965, which are determined to be landmark signs.

(b) 23 U.S.C. 131(d) provides that signs in Sec. 750.704(a) (4) and (5) must comply with size, lighting, and spacing requirements, to be determined by agreement between the State and the Secretary.

(c) 23 U.S.C. 131 does not permit signs to be located within zoned or unzoned commercial or industrial areas beyond 660 feet of the right-of-way adjacent to the Interstate or Federal-aid Primary System, outside of urban areas.

(d) 23 U.S.C. 131 provides that signs not permitted under Sec. 750.704 of this regulation must be removed by the State.

Sec. 750.705 Effective control.

In order to provide effective control of outdoor advertising, the State must:

(a) Prohibit the erection of new signs other than those which fall under Sec. 750.704(a)(1) through (6);

(b) Assure that signs erected under Sec. 750.704(a)(4) and (5) comply, at a minimum, with size, lighting, and spacing criteria contained in the agreement between the Secretary and the State;

(c) Assure that signs erected under Sec. 750.704(a)(1) comply with the national standards contained in Subpart B, Part 750, Chapter I, 23 CFR;

(d) Remove illegal signs expeditiously;

(e) Remove nonconforming signs with just compensation within the time period set by 23 U.S.C. 131 (Subpart D, Part 750, Chapter I, 23 CFR, sets forth policies for the acquisition and compensation for such signs);

(f) Assure that signs erected under Sec. 750.704(a)(6) comply with Sec. 750.710, Landmark Signs, if landmark signs are allowed;

(g) Establish criteria for determining which signs have been erected with the purpose of their message being read from the main-traveled way of an Interstate or primary highway, except where State law makes such criteria unnecessary. Where a sign is erected with the purpose of its message being read from two or more highways, one or more of which is a controlled highway, the more stringent of applicable control requirements will apply;

(h) Develop laws, regulations, and procedures to accomplish the requirements of this subpart;

(I) Establish enforcement procedures sufficient to discover illegally erected or maintained signs shortly after such occurrence and cause their prompt removal; and

(j) Submit regulations and enforcement procedures to FHWA for approval.

[40 FR 42844, Sept. 16, 1975; 40 FR 49777, Oct. 24, 1975]

Sec. 750.706 Sign control in zoned and unzoned commercial and industrial areas.

The following requirements apply to signs located in zoned and unzoned commercial and industrial areas within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way adjacent to the Interstate and Federal-aid primary highways.

(a) The State by law or regulation shall, in conformity with its agreement with the Secretary, set criteria for size, lighting, and spacing of outdoor advertising signs located in commercial or industrial zoned or unzoned areas, as defined in the agreement, adjacent to Interstate and Federal-aid primary highways. If the agreement between the Secretary and the State includes a grandfather clause, the criteria for size, lighting, and spacing will govern only those signs erected subsequent to the date specified in the agreement. The States may adopt more restrictive criteria than are presently contained in agreements with the Secretary.

(b) Agreement criteria which permit multiple sign structures to be considered as one sign for spacing purposes must limit multiple sign structures to signs which are physically contiguous, or connected by the same structure or cross-bracing, or located not more than 15 feet apart at their nearest point in the case of back-to-back or "V" type signs.

(c) Where the agreement and State law permits control by local zoning authorities, these controls may govern in lieu of the size, lighting, and spacing controls set forth in the agreement, subject to the following:

(1) The local zoning authority's controls must include the regulation of size, of lighting and of spacing of outdoor advertising signs, in all commercial and industrial zones.

(2) The regulations established by local zoning authority may be either more restrictive or less restrictive than the criteria contained in the agreement, unless State law or regulations require equivalent or more restrictive local controls.

(3) If the zoning authority has been delegated, extraterritorial, jurisdiction under State law, and exercises control of outdoor advertising in commercial and industrial zones within this extraterritorial jurisdiction, control by the zoning authority may be accepted in lieu of agreement controls in such areas.

(4) The State shall notify the FHWA in writing of those zoning jurisdictions wherein local control applies. It will not be necessary to furnish a copy of the zoning ordinance. The State shall periodically assure itself that the size, lighting, and spacing control provisions of zoning ordinances accepted under this section are actually being enforced by the local authorities.

(5) Nothing contained herein shall relieve the State of the responsibility of limiting signs within controlled areas to commercial and industrial zones.

Sec. 750.707 Nonconforming signs.

(a) General. The provisions of Sec. 750.707 apply to nonconforming signs which must be removed under State laws and regulations implementing 23 U.S.C. 131. These provisions also apply to nonconforming signs located in commercial and industrial areas within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way which come under the so-called grandfather clause contained in State-Federal agreements. These provisions do not apply to conforming signs regardless of when or where they are erected.

(b) Nonconforming signs. A nonconforming sign is a sign which was lawfully erected but does not comply with the provisions of State law or State regulations passed at a later date or later fails to comply with State law or State regulations due to changed conditions. Changed conditions include, for example, signs lawfully in existence in commercial areas which at a later date become noncommercial, or signs lawfully erected on a secondary highway later classified as a primary highway. (c) Grandfather clause. At the option of the State, the agreement may contain a grandfather clause under which criteria relative to size, lighting, and spacing of signs in zoned and unzoned commercial and industrial areas within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way apply only to new signs to be erected after the date specified in the agreement. Any sign lawfully in existence in a commercial or industrial area on such date may remain even though it may not comply with the size, lighting, or spacing criteria. This clause only allows an individual sign at its particular location for the duration of its normal life subject to customary maintenance. Preexisting signs covered by a grandfather clause, which do not comply with the agreement criteria have the status of nonconforming signs.

(d) Maintenance and continuance. In order to maintain and continue a nonconforming sign, the following conditions apply:

(1) The sign must have been actually in existence at the time the applicable State law or regulations became effective as distinguished from a contemplated use such as a lease or agreement with the property owner. There are two exceptions to actual existence as follows:

(i) Where a permit or similar specific State governmental action was granted for the construction of a sign prior to the effective date of the State law or regulations and the sign owner acted in good faith and expended sums in reliance thereon. This exception shall not apply in instances where large numbers of permits were applied for and issued to a single sign owner, obviously in anticipation of the passage of a State control law.

(ii) Where the State outdoor advertising control law or the Federal-State agreement provides that signs in commercial and industrial areas may be erected within six (6) months after the effective date of the law or agreement provided a lease dated prior to such effective date was filed with the State and recorded within thirty (30) days following such effective date.

(2) There must be existing property rights in the sign affected by the State law or regulations. For example, paper signs nailed to trees, abandoned signs and the like are not protected.

(3) The sign may be sold, leased, or otherwise transferred without affecting its status, but its location may not be changed. A nonconforming sign removed as a result of a right-of-way taking or for any other reason may be relocated to a conforming area but cannot be reestablished at a new location as a nonconforming use.

(4) The sign must have been lawful on the effective date of the State law or regulations, and must continue to be lawfully maintained.

(5) The sign must remain substantially the same as it was on the effective date of the State law or regulations. Reasonable repair and maintenance of the sign, including a change of advertising message, is not a change which would terminate nonconforming rights. Each State shall develop its own criteria to determine when customary maintenance ceases and a substantial change has occurred which would terminate nonconforming rights.

(6) The sign may continue as long as it is not destroyed, abandoned, or discontinued. If permitted by State law and reerected in kind, exception may be made for signs destroyed due to vandalism and other criminal or tortious acts.

(i) Each state shall develop criteria to define destruction, abandonment and discontinuance. These criteria may provide that a sign which for a designated period of time has obsolete advertising matter or is without advertising matter or is in need of substantial repair may constitute abandonment or discontinuance. Similarly, a sign damaged in excess of a certain percentage of its replacement cost may be considered destroyed.

(ii) Where an existing nonconforming sign ceases to display advertising matter, a reasonable period of time to replace advertising content must be established by each State. Where new content is not put on a structure within the established period, the use of the structure as a nonconforming outdoor advertising sign is terminated and shall

constitute an abandonment or discontinuance. Where a State establishes a period of more than one (1) year as a reasonable period for change of message, it shall justify that period as a customary enforcement practice within the State. This established period may be waived for an involuntary discontinuance such as the closing of a highway for repair in front of the sign.

(e) Just compensation. The States are required to pay just compensation for the removal of nonconforming lawfully existing signs in accordance with the terms of 23 U.S.C. 131 and the provisions of Subpart D, Part 750, Chapter I, 23 CFR. The conditions which establish a right to maintain a nonconforming sign and therefore the right to compensation must pertain at the time it is acquired or removed.

Sec. 750.708 Acceptance of state zoning.

(a) 23 U.S.C. 131(d) provide that signs "may be erected and maintained within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way within areas . . . which are zoned industrial or commercial under authority of State law." Section 131(d) further provides, "The States shall have full authority under their own zoning laws to zone areas for commercial or industrial purposes, and the actions of the States in this regard will be accepted for the purposes of this Act."

(b) State and local zoning actions must be taken pursuant to the State's zoning enabling statute or constitutional authority and in accordance therewith. Action which is not a part of comprehensive zoning and is created primarily to permit outdoor advertising structures, is not recognized as zoning for outdoor advertising control purposes.

(c) Where a unit of government has not zoned in accordance with statutory authority or is not authorized to zone, the definition of an unzoned commercial or industrial area in the State-Federal agreement will apply within that political subdivision or area.

(d) A zone in which limited commercial or industrial activities are permitted as an incident to other primary land uses is not considered to be a commercial or industrial zone for outdoor advertising control purposes.

Sec. 750.709 On-property or on-premise advertising.

(a) A sign which consists solely of the name of the establishment or which identifies the establishment's principal or accessory products or services offered on the property is an on-property sign.

(b) When a sign consists principally of brand name or trade name advertising and the product or service advertised is only incidental to the principal activity, or if it brings rental income to the property owner, it shall be considered the business of outdoor advertising and not an on-property sign.

(c) A sale or lease sign which also advertises any product or service not conducted upon and unrelated to the business or selling or leasing the land on which the sign is located is not an on-property sign.

(d) Signs are exempt from control under 23 U.S.C. 131 if they solely advertise the sale or lease of property on which they are located or advertise activities conducted on the property on which they are located. These signs are subject to regulation (Subpart A, Part 750, Chapter I, 23 CFR) in those States which have executed a bonus agreement, 23 U.S.C. 131(j). State laws or regulations shall contain criteria for determining exemptions. These criteria may include:

(1) A property test for determining whether a sign is located on the same property as the activity or property advertised; and

(2) A purpose test for determining whether a sign has as its sole purpose the identification of the activity located on the property or its products or services, or the sale or lease of the property on which the sign is located.

(3) The criteria must be sufficiently specific to curb attempts to improperly qualify outdoor advertising as "on-property" signs, such as signs on narrow strips of land contiguous to the advertised activity when the purpose is clearly to circumvent 23 U.S.C. 131.

Sec. 750.710 Landmark signs.

(a) 23 U.S.C. 131(c) permits the existence of signs lawfully in existence on October 22, 1965, determined by the State, subject to the approval of the Secretary, to be landmark signs, including signs on farm structures or natural surfaces, of historic or artistic significance, the preservation of which is consistent with the purpose of 23 U.S.C. 131.

(b) States electing to permit landmark signs under 23 U.S.C. 131(c) shall submit a one-time list to the Federal Highway Administration for approval. The list should identify each sign as being in the original 1966 inventory. In the event a sign was omitted in the 1966 inventory, the State may submit other evidence to support a determination that the sign was in existence on October 22, 1965.

(c) Reasonable maintenance, repair, and restoration of a landmark sign is permitted. Substantial change in size, lighting, or message content will terminate its exempt status.

Sec. 750.711 Structures which have never displayed advertising material.

Structures, including poles, which have never displayed advertising or informative content are subject to control or removal when advertising content visible from the main-traveled way is added or affixed. When this is done, an "outdoor advertising sign" has then been erected which must comply with the State law in effect on that date.

Sec. 750.712 Reclassification of signs.

Any sign lawfully erected after the effective date of a State outdoor advertising control law which is reclassified from legal-conforming to nonconforming and subject to removal under revised State statutes or regulations and policy pursuant to this regulation is eligible for Federal participation in just compensation payments and other eligible costs.

Sec. 750.713 Bonus provisions.

23 U.S.C. 131(j) specifically provides that any State which had entered into a bonus agreement before June 30, 1965, will be entitled to remain eligible to receive bonus payments provided it continues to carry out its bonus agreement. Bonus States are not exempt from the other provisions of 23 U.S.C. 131. If a State elects to comply with both programs, it must extend controls to the Primary System, and continue to carry out its bonus agreement along the Interstate System except where 23 U.S.C. 131, as amended, imposes more stringent requirements.

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