

Scenic Overlook

The Monthly Newsletter of Scenic America

February 2012

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Sec. LaHood [calls transportation bill](#) "the worst" he's ever seen...

Billboard industry responds to Arizona court ruling by seeking to [change the law](#)...

Lamar Advertising [wants to rebuild](#) storm-destroyed signs in Montana...

Hawaii [designates two](#) new state scenic byways...

Florida DOT wants billboard firm [to pay for](#) unlawful permits...

Miami [fears the proliferation](#) of more mega billboards...

New rules would keep growth from [spoiling scenic highway](#) in Florida...

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Transportation bill would end Scenic Byways Program

Congress returns to Washington this week to resume work on transportation bills that, as currently written, would eliminate or seriously undermine the National Scenic Byways Program. The House transportation bill (H.R.7) would completely eliminate the program, while the Senate bill (MAP-21) maintains the program but fails to provide it with dedicated funding.

Since the National Scenic Byways Program was established in 1991, the Secretary of Transportation has bestowed National Scenic Byway or All-American Road status upon [150 unique roads](#) across the country, and [awarded nearly \\$500 million](#) in grants

to local byways organizations in all 50 states for the maintenance, enhancement and marketing of these roads to the traveling public.

Scenic America championed the creation of the National Scenic Byways Program and believes these special roads tell the stories of America. To lose our scenic byways would be to lose a part of our history. If you feel the same way, please take a moment to [express your support for scenic byways](#) by asking your legislators to maintain and fully fund the program.



Did feds botch digital billboard safety study?

It has been over two years since the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) finished a study aimed at determining whether digital billboards are distracting to drivers. And yet, the results of the study are still unknown, FHWA having said only that the results are still under internal review.

A recent [investigative report](#) by Fair Warning may shed some light on why FHWA has not released the study. The group managed to obtain the study's [draft summary](#), which offered an interesting conclusion: drivers weren't looking at the signs at all. In fact, it



In case you missed it:

High Country News

A [major investigative piece](#) by High Country News found that billboard firms use money and power to override your vote.

Scenic America videos

Veteran videographer Ossian Or is traversing the country documenting the 'billboard wars' and you can find those videos and more [on our website](#).

Scenic Michigan publication

Scenic Michigan has partnered with the Planning and Zoning Center at Michigan State University to publish the [Michigan Sign Regulation Guidebook](#).

The guidebook addresses a wide range of issues associated with local sign regulation with a major focus on legal issues and how communities can develop sign ordinances that minimize legal risks.

Though laws vary from state to state, this guidebook will be a valuable resource to anyone with an interest in sign regulation. [Click here](#) for more information and to order.

found the average glance time at a digital billboard to be **less than one-tenth of a second**.

If accurate, the study's results present a dilemma for the industry: if drivers are ignoring the digital signs they may be no great threat to traffic safety, but for that very same reason the signs are **worthless to advertisers**. After all, what message can be absorbed in less than a tenth of a second?

However, several traffic safety experts who were shown the unreleased summary said the results were implausible and the data likely flawed, given how much shorter the reported glance times were than those found in previous, similar studies involving static billboards. So, it remains to be seen: are these signs distracting, or just digital blight on our roadways?

Industry pushes states to prevent local control of billboards

In just the last year state legislatures in Missouri, Utah, South Dakota, Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky and Florida have all seen bills introduced that would prevent municipalities from enforcing their own billboard regulations.

In Utah, SB136 [would prevent](#) municipalities like Salt Lake City from strictly regulating digital billboards like it wants to, which [prompted the introduction](#) of another bill to strengthen local control. In South Dakota, the fate of Rapid City's digital billboard ban [has see-sawed](#) back and forth with that of SB157.



In North Carolina, cities like Charlotte [fear they will lose](#) many of their trees when a new law goes into effect on March 1 that increases the "viewing zone" around billboards and prevents localities from enforcing their own regulations. A judge in Georgia has just [issued an injunction](#) to prevent a similar law there from taking effect. Likewise a new bill in Kentucky aims to [make it easier](#) for billboard companies to cut trees in the right-of-way.

One state where the right of cities to determine how they want to look has been upheld is Missouri, where last year Governor Jay Nixon [vetoed HB430](#), a bill that would have prevented local communities from banning billboards.