PW14.7



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Vehicular Destination Sign Policies for the City of Toronto

Date:	June 3, 2016
То:	Public Works and Infrastructure Committee
From:	General Manager, Transportation Services
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	p:/2016/Cluster B/tra/pr/pw16008pr

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present an updated policy for the approval of destination signage on city roads. Two new policies will replace the existing Identification and Directional Road Signage Policy adopted by City Council at its April 2003 meeting. The new policies are structured as follows:

- <u>Vehicular Destination Sign Policy</u> (expressway and arterial signage); and
- <u>Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Sign Policy</u> (welcoming signage).

These updates will enable the consistent selection of significant commercial and noncommercial destinations, promote Toronto's visitor assets, allow drivers to reach their destinations safely and with greater confidence, and reduce roadside signage clutter. The proposed policies include updated eligibility criteria and application processes for all sign categories. Design and placement criteria for Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification signs are also updated.

Further, it is recommended that the final decision on Vehicular Destination Sign applications and Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Sign applications be delegated from the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee and Community Council respectively, to the General Manager, Transportation Services.

It is expected that the new policy and procedures will reduce existing issues of driver confusion, visual clutter, sign legibility, and information overload.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Transportation Services recommends that:

- 1. City Council, upon enactment of any necessary bills to give effect to City Council's decision, rescind the Identification and Directional Road Signage Policy, and replace with the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy as described in Attachment 1, and the Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Policy as described in Attachment 2.
- 2. City Council direct that the final decision and approval for vehicular destination signage and encroachments on City highways pursuant to the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy be delegated to the General Manager, Transportation Services in accordance with this policy.
- 3. City Council direct that the final decision and approval for neighbourhood and business area identification signage and encroachments on City highways pursuant to the Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Sign Policy be delegated to the General Manager, Transportation Services in accordance with this policy, with the General Manager, Transportation Services having the sole discretion to refer any application for neighbourhood and business area identification signage to Community Council for consideration and final decision making on questions of sign copy.
- 4. City Council grant authority to the General Manager, Transportation Services to enter into necessary encroachment agreements and/or other necessary agreements with successful vehicular destination signage and neighbourhood and business area identification signage applicants on terms and conditions acceptable to the General Manager, Transportation Services and in a form acceptable to the City Solicitor.
- 5. City Council direct the General Manager, Transportation Services to begin discussions with the Ministry of Transportation Ontario to explore the adoption of the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy on provincial highways within Toronto.
- 6. City Council authorize the General Manager, Transportation Services to require all destinations with vehicular destination signs to apply for vehicular destination signage in accordance with the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy, remove all existing vehicular destination signage, and install all vehicular destination signage that is approved under the new Policy.
- 7. City Council authorize the General Manager, Transportation Services to make such administrative changes to the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy and Neighbourhood and Business Area Sign Policy as may be required from time to time in order to comply with provincial statutes and regulations and City by-laws, policies, and procedures.

- 8. City Council amend City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 441, User Fee Policy and add the following new user fees for 2016, subject to the annual inflation rate:
 - a. Application fee: \$150.00 plus all applicable taxes
 - b. Appeal fee: \$300.00 plus all applicable taxes
- 9. City Council amend City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 27, Council Procedures, to reflect that notwithstanding the current delegation to Community Council of approval of encroachment agreements related to road allowances, parks, ravines and properties owned or managed by the City, the General Manager, Transportation Services shall be delegated approval of encroachment agreements related to road allowances and properties owned or managed by the City in carrying out his authority with regard to the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy and the Neighbourhood and Business Area Sign Policy under Recommendations 2, 3 and 4.
- 10. City Council authorize the City Solicitor to introduce the necessary bills to give effect to City Council's decision, including the amendment of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 694, Signs, General, amendment of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 743, Streets and Sidewalks, Use of and enactment of a new article in Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 693, Signs, for signs on public highways, generally in accordance with Attachments 1 and 2 to this report.

Financial Impact

Adoption of the recommendations within this report will result in additional annual revenues estimated to be \$90,000.00 in 2017 from application and appeal fees to the operating budget of Transportation Services. In years 2018 and 2019, it is anticipated that total revenues from application and appeal fees will be \$9,000.00 per year. Revenues correspond to a three-year cycle with substantially larger revenues coming in every third fiscal year as all fixed three-year term sign agreements expire on a set date and destinations come forward with new applications. The addition of exit numbering identifiers on existing expressway signs will be coordinated with routine sign maintenance activities, funding for which is already included in the operating budget of Transportation Services.

All costs associated with the manufacture, installation, maintenance and replacement of vehicular destination signage will be recovered from the successful applicant.

Application and Appeal Fees

An application and appeal fee for expressway and arterial signage does not currently exist. This report recommends the introduction of a \$150.00 application fee that will be paid by destinations who wish to introduce or maintain existing expressway and/or arterial signage. Upon adoption of this report, it is estimated that the year one revenue from application fees will be \$75,000.00 for the fiscal year 2017 as existing sign holders

come into compliance with new standards and new applications from other destinations that do not currently have signage are received. Moving forward, it is anticipated that revenues will be approximately \$7,500.00 per year during years two and three of the application cycle.

In addition, this report recommends the introduction of an appeal fee of \$300.00 to be paid by applicants whose applications have been refused. This fee will cover staff time to review the appeal. The estimated annual revenue from appeal fees is \$15,000.00 (first year only) for the fiscal year 2017, while Transportation Services reviews existing sign holders' applications, as well as new applications from destinations that do not currently have signage. Moving forward, it is anticipated that revenues from appeal fees will be approximately \$1,500.00 per year during years two and three of the application cycle.

As per the City's User Fee Policy, the central principle of user fees is that they should be utilized to finance those City services that provide a direct benefit(s) to specific users and that user fees should be set to recover the full cost of those services.

The introduction of a new application and appeal fee will ensure work that provides benefits to private business interests are not paid for through taxpayers. It has been determined that these fees represent a full cost recovery in accordance with the City's User Fee By-law.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

In April 2003, Council adopted a report entitled, "Identification and Directional Road Signage Policy." The report included criteria and a process for the consideration of applications for neighbourhood and community identification, service organization information and commercial directional signing on City roads.

http://insideto.toronto.ca/transportation/roads_operations/tsop/pdf/spm/tsop_2-4.pdf

In May 2008, Council endorsed the "Premier Ranked Tourist Destination Project Summary and Recommendations" as a guide for strengthening Toronto's tourism sector in May 2008. The recommendations included "improve visitor-oriented wayfinding and directional signage."

http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/ed/bgrd/backgroundfile-12804.pdf

In October 2012, Council adopted the vision and principles outlined in the final report entitled, "Toronto 360 Wayfinding Strategy," and in doing so, directed the Acting General Manager, Transportation Services to proceed to Phase II of the Wayfinding System Strategy. Phase II includes the development and evaluation of a pedestrian-based wayfinding pilot project centred in the Financial District, and an update and consolidation of the various existing highway signage policies into one document.

http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilDecisionDocu mentReport&meetingId=5666

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The development of the updated policies was undertaken as part of the Toronto 360 Wayfinding Project ("TO360"). TO360 is an integrated, multi-modal wayfinding system for Toronto that is expected to enhance the overall image of Toronto as a destination, stimulate local growth, identify and connect places, promote multi-modal travel, and improve the public realm.

Council directed Transportation Services staff to update and consolidate the various highway destination signage policies into one document. However, during the course of the TO360 project, it became apparent that the policies and processes for all sign categories set out in the 2003 Vehicular Identification and Directional Road Signage Policy required an update to maintain consistency in their application and approval processes.

The two recommended policies work in concert with new pedestrian, transit and cyclist wayfinding signage to deliver a legible and seamless wayfinding system across all transportation modes.

Vehicular destination signs provide directional or locational information to drivers about specific attractions or destinations with the City of Toronto. Within the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy, there are two general categories for vehicular destination signs which are treated slightly differently:

- 1) **Expressway Signage**: Vehicular destination signage on municipally-owned expressways, including significant tourist attractions, convention centres, transit hubs, and sports venues; and
- 2) Arterial Signage: Vehicular destination signage on major and minor arterial roads, including destinations that qualify for expressway signage, significant tourist destinations, public facilities, universities, and hospitals.

The Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Sign Policy ("Identification Sign Policy") includes two sign categories:

- 1) **Neighbourhood Identification Signage**: Welcoming or place-making signage installed at the principal access points of a neighbourhood or community;
- 2) **Business Area Identification Signage**: Welcoming or place-making signage installed at the principal access points of a business area.

It should be noted that the proposed policies do not include street naming, which is governed by the Street Naming Policy.

Current Process

Transportation Services is responsible for reviewing and evaluating applications using the current Identification and Directional Road Signage Policy. This policy is applicable to all of the above signage categories; however, given the differences in the intent of each of the types of signage, slightly different application and review processes are in place.

Expressway and Arterial Signage applications are assessed using four criteria to determine which destinations should be included on expressway signage. Each application is reviewed to determine whether or not it is government owned and sponsored, is unique to the City of Toronto and is a major visitor attraction or destination. Lastly, the attraction must have a minimum annual attendance of 40,000 persons. The existing policy sets out an application and staff review process, and stipulates that all costs associated with the signage installation and maintenance are to be borne by the sign applicant.

Under the current policy, staff recommendations to refuse or approve Expressway and Arterial Sign applications are considered by the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee, the successor to the Works Committee.

Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Signage applications are assessed using several City policies and regulations. Staff refer to the 2003 Identification and Directional Road Signage Policy, along with Municipal Code Chapter 743, *Streets and Sidewalks*, *Use of*, where Business Improvement Areas apply for a sign installation in the public right-of-way.

Existing approval processes for Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Signage overlap in two key areas. Under the existing policy, staff recommendations to refuse or approve sign applications are to be considered by Community Council. However, Municipal Code Chapter 743 delegates authority to the General Manager to approve sign installations for Business Improvement Areas.

Issues and Challenges

Tourism Toronto, Economic Development & Culture, and other tourism industry stakeholders have had a long-standing interest in a comprehensive vehicular destination signage strategy. It is felt that Expressway and Arterial Signage could be more effective in helping residents and visitors make decisions while travelling, while also better promoting Toronto's tourism assets.

Transportation Services has also identified concerns with the proliferation of Expressway and Arterial Signage. Without a revised policy that enables equitable selection and display of commercial and non-commercial destinations, best-practices wayfinding and driver safety standards cannot be consistently met. Furthermore, the existing approval process allows decisions to be made on individual commercial vehicular destination sign applications at Committee and Council that, in aggregate, may create driver legibility and information overload issues.

These concerns were examined in greater detail by the project consultant team. Based on background research, a best-practices review, a signage audit and stakeholder consultations, a number of issues and challenges related to Expressway and Arterial Signage were identified:

- A proliferation of signs on routes such as the Gardiner Expressway has created visual clutter that can be confusing to drivers;
- The current signage qualification criteria can be easily met by many destinations, while at the same time are not broad enough to include other journey attractors such as hospitals, sites of national historic significance or transit hubs;
- Legibility issues and information overload are common. The existing system does not follow current 'best practice' design principles such as prominence, comprehension and driver response, potentially limiting the ability of drivers to make the desired action as a result;
- Current signage often fails to provide continuous information from first mention to arrival at the final destination, and focus excessively on expressway exits; and
- The current system relies on individual destination names instead of larger destination clusters or area names as points of reference.

A review of the existing policy was also undertaken to assess the effectiveness of Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Signage provisions. It was found that the existing policy generally meets the needs of stakeholders and staff in these sign categories, but requires an update to ensure that clear language is used, the sign application process is fully explained, and that all four sign category provisions are coordinated with each other.

In the drafting of the policies, staff from the City Manager's Office, Economic Development & Culture, Legal Services and City Planning were consulted.

Public Consultation

The terms of reference for the TO360 project included a robust public and stakeholder consultation process to be developed and led by a third-party facilitation firm. Stakeholder consultation for the two vehicular destination signage policies took place on numerous occasions between 2011 and 2014. Key stakeholders were consulted through the early stages of the project to discuss the main parameters upon which the policies would be built. Later in the process, drafts of the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy were presented on three occasions and a draft of the Identification Sign Policy was presented once to a wider stakeholder group to gather feedback and identify remaining concerns for consideration.

Stakeholders from many different organizations and interest areas were consulted, including Business Improvement Areas, tourist attractions (e.g. Sony Centre), residents' associations (e.g. St Lawrence Market Neighbourhood Association), Tourism Toronto, and the Canadian Automobile Association. Municipal and provincial government officials also participated.

In May 2016, stakeholders were engaged again to provide a further update to the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy and the Business Identification Sign Policy, as well as to provide information about the proposed application and appeal fees. Stakeholders did not raise any concerns about the proposed fees.

In general, stakeholders were supportive of the proposed policies and their feedback has been incorporated into the development of the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy and the Identification Sign Policy.

See Attachment 3 (Appendix B) - Toronto Vehicular Visitor Destination Signage Strategy for further information.

COMMENTS

Overview

The updated policies consolidate sign design principles, screening criteria, application requirements, decision-making processes, implementation, and maintenance obligations, and act as a single reference point for all vehicular destination signage applicants.

Two application streams for vehicular destination signs have been developed. The first stream includes Expressway and Arterial signage applications while the second stream includes the Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Signage. The review and decision-making processes for each application stream are reviewed in detail below.

The policies retain the majority of existing sign implementation and maintenance practices but provides additional clarification on the obligations of agreement holders.

As part of the TO360 project, the project consultant team produced a report entitled, "Toronto Vehicular Destination Signage Strategy," included as Attachment 3. The report provided a basis from which the updated policies were developed.

A comparison of key provisions from the existing and updated policies is included as Attachment 4.

Updated Expressway and Arterial Sign Policy

Existing issues of driver confusion, visual clutter, sign legibility, and information overload are expected to be reduced through the adoption of more stringent sign selection

criteria that ensure destination signs are placed at appropriate locations, are readable at appropriate distances by drivers, and are limited so drivers have adequate time to read the sign and make the appropriate manoeuvre.

A set of clear, measurable criteria contained within a Council-adopted policy will allow staff to consistently and fairly apply these provisions to all destinations that request vehicular destination signage. The recommended criteria are consistent with screening criteria in other jurisdictions that have adopted a vehicular destination signage policy, and align with provincial Ontario Traffic Manual signage standards.

It is recommended that the updated Vehicular Destination Sign Policy continue to highlight and promote a broad range of Toronto's visitor assets. The amended policy broadens the eligibility for attractions and includes commercial destinations, along with other important journey attractors, such as transit hubs, airports, universities, and hospitals. This increase in scope of eligibility is in line with policies in other jurisdictions.

The combined approach of numbered expressway exits and street corridor names (e.g. Yonge Street) preferred by project stakeholders is also recommended, providing opportunities for visitors to quickly and efficiently pre-plan their routes, and opportunities for destinations to easily add vehicular wayfinding as part of their marketing strategy.

By including screening criteria that require destinations to demonstrate that there are parking or drop-off facilities nearby, instances of 'block circling' to find parking may be reduced. The addition of numbered exit signs on expressways will allow destinations and visitors to easily determine their routes. In aggregate, these measures will allow drivers to find their destinations with more confidence.

The proposed Vehicular Destination Sign Policy is presented in Attachment 1.

Application Process

In order to manage the number of destinations that are included on Expressway and Arterial Signs, a two-stage process is recommended:

Stage I: Eligibility criteria will be used to determine if a destination qualifies for consideration for an Expressway Sign.

Stage II: Where applicants are competing with other sign applicants or permit holders for limited space in the same geographic area or on a single sign, a second-stage assessment will prioritize destinations based on the criteria contained within the policy.

A staff advisory panel will provide input and guidance during the review of sign applications. The review panel will have representatives from Transportation Services, Economic Development & Culture, the Sign By-law Unit of Toronto Buildings and other divisions. The panel will assess all Expressway and Arterial Sign applications in accordance with the Policy. Based on this assessment, the application will be approved or denied.

Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Signage

For Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification signage, substantive changes to existing policy provisions are not recommended. Both staff and project stakeholders have confirmed that the existing process is working well and does not need to be revisited.

Applicants will continue to be required to meet location planning, site planning and sign design provisions. However, the provisions will be updated to ensure that language and terminology are clear and consistent, and that the provisions are fully co-ordinated with municipal by-laws.

Staff propose that eligibility be expanded to include neighbourhood associations and business associations in locations where a Business Improvement Area does not exist, provided that all eligibility requirements in the Policy are met. This expansion of eligibility aligns with existing City practices and will ensure a consistent and fair process for all qualified sign applicants.

The application process also remains unchanged. The current process is led by Right-of-Way Management and includes the evaluation of applications based on defined criteria.

Although substantial changes have not been recommended, the new policy amalgamates existing by-laws and policies into one source for applicants to review, making the process easier to understand and follow.

The proposed Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Sign Policy is presented in Attachment 2.

Delegation of Authority

Final decisions for Vehicular Destination Sign and Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Sign applications are currently made by Public Works and Infrastructure Committee and Community Council, respectively. The review of best practices among other jurisdictions, as well as stakeholder feedback suggest that the process be streamlined and made consistent in order to ensure that the key principles and standards of destination signage are delivered. Transportation Services recommends that final decisions under the new policies be delegated to the General Manager, Transportation Services.

This approach to the delegation of decision-making is consistent with existing sign bylaws and sign placement practices. For example, under Municipal Chapter Code 950, Traffic and Parking, Transportation Services has authority to place or erect signs that warn or guide traffic in locations that staff consider appropriate. As Expressway and Arterial Signs are subject to the same driver requirements as other traffic signs regulated under Chapter 950, staff propose a similar approach to decision-making whereby all final decisions with respect to sign location and sign copy are the responsibility of Transportation Services. This necessarily includes instances where requests for new signage must be refused by Transportation Services for reasons of increased roadside clutter and driver safety.

This delegation of authority is in line with a number of other recent decisions by Council. For example, the Sign Variance Committee reviews applications for sign variances, with decisions by the Committee to refuse a variance being final. During the development of the Graffiti Management Plan, staff were delegated authority from Community Council to review art mural exemptions. Finally, as provided for in Chapter 693-19, A-Frame Signs, an application that has been refused based on a failure to comply with any provision in that article is not appealable or reviewable, thereby granting staff the ability to make the final decision on A-frame sign applications.

Vehicular Destination Signage

First and foremost, the recommended delegation responds to the issue of driver safety. The Vehicular Destination Sign Policy and recommended delegation support this concept by ensuring that staff have the ability to make a final refusal decision on an application where, in their professional judgement, the application is not consistent with sign design criteria such as legibility, prominence, information load and driver response, or is not consistent with best practices municipal and provincial sign design standards such as the Ontario Traffic Manual.

Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Signage

The majority of Neighbourhood and Business Area sign structures are currently installed by Business Improvement Areas and do not require Community Council approval, consistent with article 743-32 under Municipal Chapter Code 743, *Streets and Sidewalks, Use of.* These signs tend to be highly contextual so staff consult with local Councillors, Business Improvement Areas, resident groups, and other stakeholders as a matter of practice and consider these inputs when making decisions. Any issues that arise are typically settled between stakeholders through this process, with the large majority of these applications adopted by Community Council as a routine matter.

The delegation of decision making to the General Manager, Transportation Services will enable a greater number of routine applications to be processed by staff, and will reduce the administrative workload on Council and Committees. Furthermore, during consultations, it was reported that stakeholders felt that Community Council approval was inconsistent with current practices and would unnecessarily delay project implementation.

Checks and Balances on Delegation of Authority

Several important limits are proposed to the delegated authority provided by City Council to the General Manager, Transportation Services. All Expressway and Arterial sign application decisions will be reviewed against defined criteria that have been tested through the stakeholder consultation process and are set out in the Council-adopted Policy. An interdivisional staff advisory panel which will reflect the needs of all users and will include representatives from Transportation Services, Economic Development & Culture, the Sign By-law Unit of Toronto Buildings, and other Divisions will review all such applications, and also provide input to the General Manager, Transportation Services on applications which have been appealed.

As with the Vehicular Destination Policy, staff will review each sign application against defined criteria that are set out in the Council-adopted Policy. The General Manager may also, at his or her discretion, refer Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification sign applications to Community Council for consideration where there are sign copy issues such as disagreements between stakeholders related to the naming of neighbourhoods and commercial areas. This benefits all parties by providing for a full consideration of these issues by Councillors, stakeholders and members of the public.

Finally, to ensure transparency and consistency in decision-making, Transportation Services will report to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee at the end of each three-year cycle on the results for both sign application types for that period. This will allow Council the opportunity to maintain oversight over decisions made by Transportation Services through the proposed delegated authority.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Expressway and Arterial Signage

Following approval of the policies by City Council, Transportation Services will issue letters to all existing expressway and arterial sign holders notifying them of the new policy and advising them that an application must be submitted for consideration by the City.

All applications during the implementation period will be considered in a co-ordinated manner.

Applicants will be notified whether their new application has been accepted or refused. Successful applicants will continue to be identified on road signage in accordance with the Policy. Unsuccessful applications or destinations that fail to submit a new application will have their signs removed following completion of the application and appeal process. Applications for new signs that do not currently exist on arterials and expressways will be placed on hold until all existing sign holders have been notified of their application status. This will allow Transportation Services and businesses an opportunity to transition to the new regulations before allowing new signs to be implemented.

Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Signage

As this staff report does not recommend substantive changes to this sign category, a transition strategy is not required. Any updates that may be required to existing signs will be undertaken as signs require replacement or major maintenance.

NEXT STEPS

Toronto 360 Coordination

The provision of other TO360 wayfinding products is a complementary but essential component of vehicular wayfinding, allowing drivers to exit their vehicles and proceed on foot to their destinations quickly and with confidence.

Further, a number of places and attractions that are not eligible for Vehicular Destination Signs or Identification Signs will benefit from other types of wayfinding signage such as finger posts, wayfinding totems, transit shelter maps, handheld maps, and digital wayfinding products. This type of signage is especially relevant for downtown attractions and Business Improvement Areas where the modal split favours transit users and pedestrians. A report on the results of the Toronto 360 pilot implementation and recommendations for city-wide roll-out is being prepared for City Council's consideration in the fall.

Expressway Signage 'Exit' Tabs

Numbered exit tabs will be installed by Transportation Services staff as part of routine expressway sign maintenance activities.

Co-ordination with Provincial Highways

An updated Vehicular Destination Sign Policy allows the City to propose its adoption on Provincial highways within Toronto. This additional measure would give the City the opportunity to expand the scope and reach of the TO360 Wayfinding Strategy as recommended by the project consultant team.

Furthermore, the presence of conflicting criteria for the determination of eligibility for signage on provincial highways creates inconsistency in the types of destinations approved for signs on municipal and provincial highways within the City. Therefore, a coordinated approach between the City and Province would allow sign standards to be applied consistently across the full breadth of the City of Toronto.

This opportunity was well received by project stakeholders during project consultations.

Upon adoption of the recommendations in this report, Transportation Services will begin discussions with the Ministry of Transportation Ontario to explore the adoption of the Vehicular Destination Sign Policy on provincial highways within Toronto.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Vehicular Destination Signage Policy

Attachment 2 – Neighbourhood and Business Area Identification Sign Policy

Attachment 3 – Toronto Vehicular Visitor Destination Sign Strategy

Attachment 4 – Comparison of Policy Provisions