

PG15.4.2

TPSI Opposes PG15.4 (LED Billboard Proposal)

TPSI opposes the proposal for a significant number of additional LED billboards along Toronto roadways.

The proposal is problematic for multiple reasons:

1. The proposed billboards are **illegal** under the current Sign Bylaw. The proposal seeks to amend the Sign Bylaw to allow for these individual billboards, weakening the integrity of the law and opening the doors to future proposals to bypass existing laws on an ad hoc basis.
2. Bright advertising on roadways **distracts drivers**. Numerous empirical studies, literature reviews, and controlled experiments link these types of billboards to increased traffic safety risks and accidents.
3. At least two of the proposed billboard locations are **near residential areas**, where they may negatively impact property values.
4. We have indications that '**bundling**' may be taking place, where the proponent may be offering 'donations' for a Councillor's desired community project in order to gain support for this proposal.

The Staff report outlines the research findings of City Staff. Specifically, the Transportation Services Division review found;

- There are strong foundations in the psychology of cognition, perception and human factors to suggest roadside electronic billboard signs can capture and hold a road user's attention at the expense of the driving, cycling and walking tasks;
- Research sponsored by the advertising industry generally concludes that roadside electronic billboard signs do not impact road user safety;
- Research sponsored by road authorities, the insurance industry and safety specialists have consistently demonstrated that the presence of roadside electronic billboard signs contribute to road user distraction to a level which impacts the driving task; and
- Roadside electronic billboards generate enough of a distraction that guidelines, restrictions and/or controls have been generated and applied in several jurisdictions to mitigate the impact and maximize road user's attention to the driving, cycling and walking tasks. These guidelines and restrictions include brightness, message duration, message change interval, billboard location with regard to traffic control devices and roadway geometry.
- Although it has been demonstrated that electronic billboard signs can have a distractive effect on drivers, the impact on safety cannot be consistently measured in terms of collision data due to the number and complexity of all the factors involved in collision occurrences and details contained within collision reports.

Staff are recommending a 2 year study of the traffic safety issues, among other concerns, after the signs are installed. TPSI opposes this proposal given the empirically evidenced risks to traffic safety that numerous studies have already demonstrated, including links between increased traffic accidents and electronic billboards. Further, Staff are recommending that permit review of these signs be increased to 15 years from the standard 5 years, when ultimately only a 2 year permit would be appropriate if their research proposal were to be meaningful.

In addition, TPSI opposes experimenting on live subjects (the residents of Toronto) when there are known risks, including potentially life threatening risks, associated with conducting research.

Finally, the duration of 2 years for study appears arbitrarily chosen without consideration of the necessary and appropriate research design required, which could mandate less time for study, or far more time for study.

TPSI would welcome additional research, however, such research should be conducted in partnership with a credible and unbiased University institution following approval by an ethical review panel. The research should look at decades of past data, instead of setting up additional risky experiments. And finally, the integrity of the existing Sign Bylaw, created to reflect good planning practice,



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existing research and the priorities of Torontonians through public consultations should be upheld.