

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF

COMMERCE

John T. Connor, Secretary

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Office of the Secretary

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REMARKS BY ALAN S. BOYD, UNDER SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR TRANSPORTATION PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BEFORE THE FLORIDA OUTDOOR ADVERTISING ASSOCIATION AT THE QUALITY COURTS GARDEN MOTEL, ORLANDO, FLORIDA, AT 12:30 P.M., SATURDAY, JANUARY 22, 1966

It is always a pleasure to come back home to Florida, especially during the month of January.

It is timely and fitting, too, for me to be here talking to the Florida Outdoor Advertising Association, for we in the Department of Commerce will probably be doing some business with you folk in the not too distant future.

As you know, the last session of Congress passed a Highway Beautification Act which provides for more effective control of outdoor advertising. It also provides further control of junkyards along the highways, and for landscaping and scenic enhancement both within and outside rights-of-way of the Federal highway system.

The law directs that the Secretary of Commerce conduct public hearings on a number of issues dealing with the control of outdoor advertising. The exact dates and other details of these hearings will be published by the Bureau of Public Roads within the next few days.

Florida's outdoor advertising fraternity will get its chance to be heard April 26 in Tallahassee, according to tentative plans.

The effort to control billboard advertising is not brand new. A law enacted in 1958 offered States a bonus of one-half of one per cent of the Federal share of projects on the Interstate Highway System where advertising signs were controlled in accordance with agreements with the Bureau of Public Roads.

By the time that feature of the law expired in June of 1965, only 25 states had passed necessary enabling legislation and had entered into agreements. This covered only 18,000 miles on the Interstate System.

The Highway Beautification Act of 1965 covers the whole Federal-Aid Primary System, including the Interstate, or a total of 268,000 miles. To review it briefly for you:

States are required to make provisions by January 1, 1968, for effective control of outdoor ads within 660 feet of the edge of the right-of-way on all Primary System highways.

Signs which advertise the sale or lease of property on which they are located, and signs advertising activities conducted on the property are not subject to control. Official and directional signs are permitted, but they must conform to national standards of size, spacing and lighting as promulgated by the Secretary of Commerce -- and this, incidentally, will be one of the subjects for those public hearings I mentioned earlier.

Signs in zoned or unzoned commercial or industrial areas are permitted, subject to size, spacing and lighting regulations agreed to by the states and the Secretary of Commerce, and this again will be a subject for the public hearings. Based on customary use, unzoned commercial or industrial areas also are to be defined by agreement between the States and the Secretary.

Signs legally in existence as of September 1, 1965, are not required to be removed until July 1, 1970, even though they are in controlled areas. This should provide for an orderly transition, and for a legally acceptable amortization time for removal of the signs.

The law provides that just compensation must be paid to the owner of the signs, also to the owner of the property involved, for the removal of the signs in controlled areas. This means signs which were lawfully in existence as of October 22, 1965, the date of the enactment of the law. The Federal share of this compensation is 75 per cent, the State's share 25 per cent.

The Bureau of Public Roads already is engaged in an inventory of these signs -- no small task in and of itself.

The Secretary of Commerce, in consultation with the states, must provide for signs within the Interstate right-of-way to inform the travelling public of specific services and facilities which are available at an approaching interchange.

The States are authorized to keep maps and other informational material to assist motorists at safety rest areas.

The States, also subject to approval by the Secretary, may establish informational centers at rest areas to inform the public of places of interest within the states -- or any such other information as a State may consider desirable.

This latter provision -- "such other information as a State may consider desirable" -- has been interpreted by some as a new opportunity for the outdoor advertising industry.

It is seen as a new chance to offer a new approach to along-the-road advertising. The president of the Outdoor Advertising Association of America, Phil Tocker, has suggested that the states might resort to bidding procedures for handling this kind of advertising, thus producing some revenue for the States as well as offering a service to customers and those engaged in business along the highway.

It is an intriguing idea, and the fact that it is subject to the approval of both the state and the Secretary of Commerce, gives assurance that it can be kept within the bounds of good taste.

These are some of the problems which representatives of the Secretary of Commerce and the State will be discussing with interested parties -- which I assume will include many of you -- at the public hearings this coming spring.

The ground rules for the public hearings will be spelled out when the Bureau of Public Roads publishes them within a few days in the Federal Register as required by law.

These ground rules are not to be construed as final proposals in any sense. They are at best simply the basis for getting the public hearings underway.

We want your ideas, your protests, your approvals, etc., for this is a comparatively new field we are entering.

These public hearings will be held in all the states between the first of March and early May to establish standards, criteria, rules and regulations. The Secretary of Commerce is charged with reporting to Congress on this matter no later than January 10, 1967. He also will be required to furnish Congress with a detailed estimate of what is needed to carry out the act, what its impact might be on business, what its benefits to the public, how much will be required to compensate sign and property owners, etc.

Those states which fail to achieve effective control of outdoor advertising -- or junkyards -- by January 1, 1968, will have their Federal-aid highway apportionments reduced by 10 per cent. This reduction may be waived by the Secretary of Commerce if he deems such action as being in the public interest.

I don't want to leave the impression here, however, that this legislation was concerned only with outdoor advertising. Its primary intent was the beautification of our highways.

In urging the Congress to act on this matter in his State of the Union message of a year ago, President Johnson said "a new and substantial effort must be made to landscape highways and provide places of relaxation and recreation wherever our roads run."

"By making our roads highways to the enjoyment of nature and beauty," the President has said, "we can greatly enrich the life of nearly all our people in city and countryside alike."

In responding, the Congress continued the use of appropriation from the Highway Trust Fund for landscaping and roadside development, and of building rest and recreational areas within the right of way on the Federal-Aid System. This requires state matching funds of either 10 or 50 per cent.

The Highway Beautification Act also provides the states with unmatched funds equivalent to three percent of a State's apportionment for acquisition of interest in and improvement of adjacent strips of land for the restoration, preservation, and enhancement of scenic beauty and for landscaping of roadside development within or outside the right-of-way.

In this connection, I would like to call your attention to the fact that the Internal Revenue Service ruled recently that contributions to programs designed to conserve the nation's natural beauty are deductible for income tax purposes.

Gifts of money, land, or other property to governmental agencies or to qualified private organizations engaged in fostering natural beauty may be deducted by individuals or corporations. Also deductible is the value of scenic easements donated to Federal, State or local governments.

The aim of the Highway Beautification Act in this regard is to protect the beauty of the whole corridor through which a road passes.

This program is a continuing effort requiring perhaps a decade to accomplish.

The Administrative machinery already is being set up in the Bureau of Public Roads, Landscape architects are being hired in each of our Regional Offices around the country. To date, program approval and authorization for 141 projects have been received.

So we are on our way to making our roads "highways to the enjoyment of nature and beauty."

To do this, of course, requires the cooperation of millions of people and most especially you people in the outdoor advertising industry.

This represents a major readjustment in many of your businesses, but I am sure you will prove equal to the task.

I would suggest that you view it in the same light as your association's national president -- as a new opportunity.

21 Our Nation is enjoying an unmatched period of good times, and the growth picture of the future is the brightest ever.

And I'm sure we don't have to worry about the ingenuity and drive and the ability of this segment of Florida's advertising industry -- the best in the land, incidentally -- to get along.