

SPECIFIC SERVICE SIGNS
FULL SERVICE FOOD LOGO PANEL EXPERIMENT
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
APRIL 21, 2004

Problem Statement:

The 2003 MUTCD establishes the standards that the number of Specific Service signs (“sign structures”) along an approach to an interchange or intersection, regardless of the number of service types displayed, shall be limited to a maximum of four, with the five permissible categories of attractions, camping, lodging, food, and gas services. They are to be displayed in that order in the direction of traffic flow. In addition, there is a standard that each sign assembly (“motherboard”) shall be limited to no more than six logo panels and that no service type shall appear on more than one sign. Thus, if one motherboard is set up to display solely the food category, you would have a limit of six food establishments represented with logo panels. A seventh food logo could not be placed on the existing food motherboard or any other motherboard that has a vacant spot.

With the four structure, six logo, no service type on more than one motherboard standards, there is usually at least one motherboard that is underutilized. This is most often the camping motherboard.

With the inception of the 2000 MUTCD, the attractions category was added. This will permit logos in the attractions category to share the camping motherboard. Virginia has yet to utilize the attractions category. Virginia is in the process of developing criteria under an Integrated Directional Signing Program to do so.

As in most states, there is significant desire by the business community in Virginia to utilize the excess space (motherboards that do not have 6 logo panels) by revising the standard that no service type shall be on more than one sign. Most of this desire occurs from businesses in the food category.

There is also a desire in Virginia to better serve motorists with a variety food opportunities based upon the type of service and the quality of that service. Virginia has established 2 food service categories and is considering others (see Attachment A). The criteria for the experimental Full Service Food participants are also included in Attachment A. These categories are basically related to distance to the interchange, hours of service, type of food served, seating capacities, and the type of food service. With high demand for space and the limit of 6 food logos, when vacancies exist on multiple motherboards, it is considered a disservice to the public not to be able to utilize the vacant space on other motherboards with overflow logos of the same category from another motherboard when the condition exists.

Hypothesis:

The hypothesis of this experiment is that permitting 2 full service food logos on another motherboard (Camping/Attractions motherboard, or other vacant service sign motherboard, or if no camping or attraction logos exist at the interchange another motherboard specifically for full food service) that has vacant space, when there is already a motherboard with 6 food logos, provides a better level of service by providing more information to the motorist. Additionally, it is no more distracting/confusing to the motorist than a motherboard having combinations of logos such as camping/attractions and that there is no additional safety risk caused by having more than 6 food logos on two sign structures.

The number of specific service sign structures along an approach to any of the interchanges will be limited to 4 maximum. In situations where there is no camping service (for example), a motherboard for full service food will be used in lieu of camping.

Proposed Change:

The standard that no service category (e.g. food) can be displayed on more than one motherboard will be removed so that food logos can be displayed on excess space available on another motherboard (e.g. food logo displayed on camping/attraction motherboard when there already exists a food motherboard with 6 food logos). Attachment B provides two scenarios.

Research and Evaluation Plan:

Evaluations will be made comparing the operations along 3 distinct corridors (I-64, I-81, and I-95) at 7 interchanges with and 7 adjacent interchanges (control interchanges) without food logos on multiple motherboards. The 7 interchanges where there are food motherboards with 6 food logos on one motherboard and another motherboard where 1 or 2 food logos (full service food) have been added in conjunction with other services (e.g. camping) or stand alone, resulting in 7 or 8 food logos for the approach to the interchange are:

- I-64 @ Exit 124
- I-81 @ Exit 118
- I-81 @ Exit 150
- I-81 @ Exit 264
- I-95 @ Exit 92
- I-95 @ Exit 126
- I-95 @ Exit 143

Surveys will be developed to measure driver reaction to the impact of food logos on more than one motherboard and the benefits (if any) of having more than 6 food logos with varying levels of food service on the approach to the interchanges. Accident data at the interchange locations will be reviewed to determine if there is any relationship with the experimental signs.

Duration:

The experiment will last 18 months following notification from FHWA to proceed.

Restoration Agreement:

VDOT agrees to remove all experimental signs, so that all Specific Service signs will be in conformance with the current MUTCD (2003 MUTCD at the time of initiation of this experiment), unless the experiment is deemed successful and official rule making action is requested to amend the MUTCD to include this signing practice. Removal will occur within three months of notification by FHWA that the results were not successful.

VDOT agrees to terminate the experiment immediately upon determination that significant safety or operational hazards are directly or indirectly attributable to the experiment.

Reports:

VDOT agrees to provide FHWA with semi-annual progress reports for the duration of the experiment and agrees to provide a copy of the final results on the experiment to FHWA within three months following completion of the experiment.