Advertising signs

Introduction

This section describes the NZ Transport Agency’s (NZTA) approach to advertising signs alongside of the state highway, and the methods used to ensure that signs do not have a negative effect.

Traffic signs and advertising signs

Traffic signs include signs that convey information about speed restrictions, hazards, directions and highway services. The requirement to maintain a high level of traffic safety and efficiency on State highways means that official signs are carefully designed and cause little or no problems in terms of driver distraction.

Advertising signs include signs promoting goods, services, events, attractions and community benefit information. The potential effects on traffic safety, particularly driver distraction, created by advertising signs is the key reason the NZTA seeks to control and influence the size, location, content and appearance of signs on or visible from a state highway.

Potential safety hazards of signs

Signs that are difficult to read can create a safety hazard. This is particularly so in high-speed environments (70km/h and above) when a driver's ability to take in multiple pieces of information is greatly diminished.

In addition, a proliferation of signs beside a road can reduce the effectiveness of their message and contribute to visual clutter. Signs should ideally form an integral component of a state highway and not detract from it.

Poorly located signs can reduce visibility at intersections and bends. Unofficial signs placed in locations where they compete with or mimic official signs or traffic signals or are reflectorised can confuse drivers.

Poorly erected or maintained signs can present a safety hazard to road users if they fall or are blown onto the carriageway.

Signs within the state highway road reserve

All advertising signs within the state highway road reserve are controlled by the NZTA through the New Zealand Transport Agency (Signs on State Highways Bylaw) 2010. This Bylaw expressly prohibits advertising and other unofficial signs on motorways. Advertising signs on state highways require written consent from the NZTA unless the sign is behind the kerbline of any state highway in any area where a 50km/h or lesser speed limit applies.

Some types of advertising signs may be permitted, usually where they are for community events and the signs are temporary and there is no practical alternative location. These signs may also require resource consent from the territorial authority. Further policy and information on signs within the state highway reserve can be found in the State Highway Control Manual.

Advertising signs outside the state highway road reserve

Advertising signs on land outside the state highway road reserve are generally subject to controls administered by territorial authorities. This may be either district plan rules or through local authority bylaws under the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA). Where the sign is visible from a state highway, the NZTA often has input into proposals to erect advertising signs as an affected party under the RMA. The NZTA's primary concern with signs visible from the state highway network is to avoid, remedy or mitigate the creation of risks to the safety of road users. However, if a local authority chooses to control signs by creating bylaws under the LGA, the NZTA may not have a formal ability to influence decision making.
For signs within the state highway road reserve the NZTA will:

- generally not allow commercial advertising signs to be erected or maintained within the state highway reserve except where a state highway has a posted speed limit of 50km/h or below when the NZTA may allow commercial advertising signs to be erected on areas other than the carriageway or curb.
- assess proposals to erect signs within the state highway reserve in accordance with the New Zealand Transport Agency (Signs on State Highways Bylaw) 2010.
- require the removal of old, poorly maintained, inadequately secured or redundant signs that may present a safety hazard to state highway users.
- consider proposals to erect and/or maintain temporary community signs within the state highway reserve at sites where no practical alternative exists and where traffic safety is not compromised on a case-by-case basis.
- not allow advertising on official signs or support structures.

For signs outside the state highway road reserve the NZTA will:

- advocate for prevention of the erection of signs outside but visible from the state highway that may adversely affect traffic safety.
- advocate for appropriate structural construction standards for signs in the vicinity of a state highway that are equivalent to those required for official signage.
- encourage the removal or replacement of old, poorly maintained, inadequately secured or redundant signs located outside but visible from the state highway.

Amenity:
Control of the amenity effects of signage outside the state highway road reserve is primarily a local authority function. The NZTA will generally only seek to become involved in managing such amenity effects when state highway landscaping or other urban design outcomes may be compromised.

Methods

1. Bylaw control
The NZTA seeks to avoid the adverse effects that signs can have on the safe and efficient operation of the state highway network through the application of controls on the location, number, size and design of signs through New Zealand Transport Agency (Signs on State Highways Bylaw) 2010 (including any future updates).

2. RMA plans
The NZTA will work with local authorities by advocating the inclusion of policies and rules in district plans and regional coastal plans to control signs that may impact adversely on the state highway. The NZTA will advocate for signs to be controlled through RMA plans (rather than through bylaws under the LGA) and will seek the inclusion of objectives, policies and rules that:
- specify minimum performance standards for signs in accordance with:
  - clause 4.7 and 13.7(c) of the Land Transport NZ Traffic Control Devices Rule.
  - AS/NZS 1170 (Structural Integrity of Signs) or Road Safety Manufacturers’ Association Compliance Standard for Traffic Signs.
- traffic safety requirements, including requirements to protect vehicular and pedestrian safety and prevent the imitation of official traffic signs or the obscuring of views of intersections or curves.
- identify the NZTA as an affected party where the sign is visible from the state highway and either the above performance standards are not met or where the state highway speed limit is 70km/h or above.

3. Education
The NZTA will be proactive in informing territorial authorities, developers, land
owners and the public of the need to control signs that are visible from a state highway to minimise any adverse effects on the safe and efficient operation of the state highway.