

SB 1310 - Digital Billboards Action Alert!

The Senate Transportation Committee will hear SB 1310 on Tuesday, April 29th!

Your calls, emails and letters are having an impact! Please continue to call, write and email the Senate to oppose SB 1310!

As you are aware, San Francisco Beautiful is strongly opposing SB 1310 which would authorize the conversion of existing billboards near landscaped portions of our freeways to digital/electronic format. This is essentially the same bill as AB 830 which was proposed by Assemblymember Fiona Ma last year.

Talking Points:

- Converting existing billboards to electronic format would:
 - * Intensify billboard blight by increasing their visual impact, glare, and brightness level;
 - * Increase billboard energy use by at least 10 to 15 times;
 - * Significantly lengthen the life of old, non-conforming billboards; &
 - * Possibly result in 120 to 240 new digital billboards along our highways.

Please contact Senator Alan Lowenthal, Chair of the Senate Transportation & Housing Committee and continue to voice your opposition to SB 1310. Contact information and a sample letter are set out below. Senator Leland Yee's contact information is also below for his San Francisco constituents.

Senator Alan Lowenthal Contact Info:

The Honorable Senator Alan Lowenthal, Chair
Senate Transportation and Housing Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 2032
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 651-4027
Fax: (916) 327-9113
Email: Senator.Lowenthal@sen.ca.gov

Senator Leland Yee Contact Info:

The Honorable Leland Yee, Senator
Senate Transportation and Housing Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 4048
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 651-4008
Fax: (916) 327-2186

Online Contact Form:

<http://legplcms01.lc.ca.gov/PublicLCMS/ContactPopup.aspx?district=SD08>

Sample Letter:

Transportation & Housing Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 2059
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Please Oppose Senate Bill 1310 - Digital Outdoor Advertising

Dear Senator:

I strongly oppose Senate Bill 1310 that would allow for the conversion of existing billboards along California's landscaped highways to a digital format. Digitizing existing billboards is not merely upgrading to new technology. Electronic billboards are a new form of blight that will further degrade our already impacted public highways. Currently, our highways are lined with innumerable billboards that degrade our public spaces. Converting those billboards to electronic format with a new advertisement broadcast every six seconds as SB 1310 proposes would intensify the blight by increasing their visual impact, glare, and brightness level and would waste valuable energy.

SB 1310 proposes to amend the California Business and Professions Code in the same manner as AB 830 - a 2007 bill sponsored by Assemblymember Fiona Ma. At the time, the City of Oakland, Port of Oakland, the CHP and Caltrans fielded hundreds of complaints from members of the public who were extremely upset over the blinding and garish CBS Outdoor digital billboard at the San Francisco/Oakland Bay Bridge toll plaza. Unfortunately, the electronic billboard remains and at night can be seen miles away in the Oakland Hills and even places in Marin County. More of these blazing digital billboards are being erected across California. Is this what you want to replicate along our landscaped highways across our beautiful state?

While the bill references other California code sections that could allow for local government approval and regulation for billboard conversion, this bill would lead to a piecemeal and scattershot conversion of innumerable billboards across the state. If SB 1310 becomes law, California cities and counties with few billboard regulations will have little defense against the conversion of a billboard to electronic format. Even cities and counties that have taken a strong stance against the proliferation of billboards, like San Francisco, will be swamped with requests to digitize them.

The recent amendments to SB 1310 do little or nothing to mitigate its impact if approved. One amendment limits the number of billboard conversions to five percent of the total each year and another amendment sunsets the bill in January 2012. According to the bill's legislative analysis, Caltrans has 790 permits on file for nonconforming signs along landscaped highways. Even with the five percent limitation, SB 1310 could still

generate at least 118.5 digital billboards in the next three years if it is approved. This number is clearly the minimum as Caltrans permits are only for sign structures and many billboards have advertising on each side of the billboard structure. A worst-case scenario if this legislation passes would be 237 new blazing electronic billboards blighting our landscaped highways for years to come.

Other amendments also do little to alleviate the significant impacts of SB 1310. The legislation inserts a vague requirement that the digital conversion of a billboard must provide a "community benefit," with no indication of what that benefit would be. The insertion of this amendment is a feeble attempt to make the acceptance of a significant increase in blight palatable to local communities. A real community benefit would be for the billboard industry to remove the many aging, dilapidated billboards that currently exist along landscaped highways rather than attempt to digitize them.

Finally, the bill now requires that Caltrans determine the fair market value of a billboard display prior to its conversion so if the state ever wants to take the billboard down it will only have to compensate the owner for the value of the unconverted billboard. Again, this amendment does nothing to alleviate the impacts of SB 1310. As the legislative analysis states, "[t]he intent of the OAA (Outdoor Advertising Act) is to prevent the erection of advertising displays along landscaped freeways and, eventually, to eliminate them. ... Converting an advertising display to a digital message center will extend a sign's useful life for an indefinite period of time." Our landscaped highways should not have to bear the burden of nonconforming billboards, digital or otherwise, indefinitely into the future.

In 2002, nearly 80% of San Francisco voters approved Proposition G, the "No New Billboards" ballot measure. A number of other cities and counties in California, including several in your district, have also passed measures to limit or ban billboards.

Many of your constituents have clearly said no to new billboards and also oppose intensifying existing billboards by digitizing them. I urge you to oppose SB 1310.

Sincerely,

Your Name Here