

What Makes a Sign Effective?

Summary

Signage must address human behaviour factors. Based on the research of Allison Smiley, Human Factors North Inc., the following factors affect signage usability and effectiveness. On Level I and Level II controlled access highways, where speeds exceed 90 kilometres per hour, effective signage considers:

- motorists have only 6 to 10 seconds to locate and read a sign
- motorists require about 1 second to read each word or symbol
- motorists spot consistent signage more readily
- motorists must continue to watch the road
- motorist maneuverability time
- legibility distance
- the smallest critical detail must be legible
- sign must contrast with the background
- sign must be located easily
- sign must be read quickly
- sign must contain only information that is needed (minimizing the length of the message often maximize effectiveness)
- sign letters must be of sufficient height and spacing
- sign letters must be of a specific, clear font for highway visibility
- sign symbols must be understood by the driver

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To design signs according to consumer needs and preferences, there are two issues to be considered. The first issue concerns the fundamental level of usability. Once the usability requirement is met, then and only then should the second issue of consumer preference be dealt with.

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