

**STUDY OF THE  
ERECTION OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION  
AND OTHER VARIABLE MESSAGE ADVERTISING DISPLAYS  
TO  
THE GOVERNOR  
AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



**Senate Document No. 22**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
Department of Purchases and Supply  
Richmond  
1978**



Report on cooperative study of the erection of electronic information and other variable message advertising displays along the highways of the Commonwealth pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution No. 137.

Senate Joint Resolution No. 137 requested representatives of the Department of Highways and Transportation, the Highway Safety Division, the Highway and Transportation Research Council, the Governor's Advisory Committee on Outdoor Advertising, the Garden Club of Virginia, and the Department of State Police to undertake a cooperative study of the feasibility of utilizing new outdoor advertising mechanisms, including electronic information displays and message centers with variable copy to accommodate advertising needs along Virginia highways. The agency representatives suggested Mr. R. L. Hundley act as Chairman of the group which will hereinafter be referred to as the committee.

The committee has considered at length various aspects of permitting businesses to use electronically operated information displays and other forms of variable message advertising which involve motion, rotation, or intermittent light or lights to advertise their products and services.

The use of electronic information displays or message centers and other forms of variable message advertising is currently prohibited within 100 feet of the pavement edge of any highway in accordance with Section 33.1-369(2) of the State Code. However, except for the Interstate system, the Code permits displays which involve motion, rotation, or intermittent light or lights within 100 feet of the edge of pavement when such displays convey solely public service information including time, temperature, weather, and other similar information. Upon completion of a cooperative study, participants were to report to the Governor and the General Assembly and offer such legislative and other recommendations necessary, based on its findings.

Based on committee discussions and a review of the available literature, the committee's findings are as follows:

- (1) The concept of variable outdoor advertising messages through the use of electronic information displays has recently been developed and is not in widespread use in the United States.
- (2) While no study was found that indicated a relationship between outdoor advertising and highway accidents, there is some evidence that moving displays of high information content are likely to distract the attention of a driver and should be regulated.
- (3) The committee is concerned that a less restrictive state law governing mechanisms, electronic information displays, and other forms of variable message advertising will add substantially to the visual pollution along Virginia's highways.
- (4) The committee would emphasize that while outdoor advertising in sight of public highways is regulated, all advertising is not prohibited, and opportunity exists under the State Code to advertise. Additionally, opportunity exists under the State Code to utilize the variable message concept, especially beyond 100 feet from the highway pavement edge of other than Interstate and Federal Aid Primary highways.
- (5) A preliminary literature review indicates that there is little information available that can be used to determine the influence and effects of new advertising mechanisms, including electronically operated and other variable message advertising mechanisms.
- (6) The committee's deliberations included the feasibility of a study to examine the impact of variable message outdoor advertising signs on highway safety and aesthetics, and other factors.

It is the considered opinion of the committee that a definitive study would be very expensive and such study is not apt to yield a resolution of these complex issues and would be of questionable value.

Pursuant to the committee's findings, this report does not include or recommend legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

R. L. Hundley, Chairman  
Virginia Dept. of Highways & Transportation

Participants:

Martin R. Parker, Jr.  
Virginia Highway & Transportation  
Research Council

R. W. DuVal  
Highway Safety Division

Major C. M. Boldin  
Department of State Police

H. T. N. Graves & Bevin R. Alexander  
Advisory Committee on Outdoor Advertising

Mrs. James B. Montgomery  
Garden Club of Virginia

