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IOWA OUTDOOR ADVERTISING REGULATIONS FOR

INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS

INTERSTATE

IOWA

Scope and authority

This guide will acquaint you with Iowa laws regulating outdoor advertising along interstate highways. It is limited in scope to the regulation of off-premise outdoor advertising signs, hereinafter referred to simply as "billboards," along interstate highways. For regulations pertaining to billboards on the remaining Primary Road System, refer to the publication titled "Guide to Iowa Outdoor Advertising Sign Regulations."

This guide is intended to summarize requirements found in Iowa Code Chapter 306B, 306C and 306D; and Iowa Administrative Rule 761 IAC Chapter 117. These Iowa Code sections were developed in accordance with federal laws directing states to enforce these federal regulations. Although this guide has been developed to aid in the comprehension of these regulations, any interpretation of its contents would be subject to the standards set forth in the statutes themselves.

Iowa's interstate highways are:

- I-29
- I-35
- I-74
- I-80
- I-235
- I-280
- I-380
- I-480
- I-680

The limits of control by state regulation extend as far as visibility allows in the rural areas. Inside city limits, the limits of control extend 660 feet from the right-of-way line.

Permit required

A completed permit application for each face of the billboard must be submitted to the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) for approval prior to erecting the billboard along the interstate highway. A copy of the lease between the sign owner and landowner, along with an application fee of $100 for each face of the billboard, must be filed with the application(s). Once the Iowa DOT performs a field review of the proposed site, the application fee cannot be refunded.

The proposed site will be reviewed by Iowa DOT personnel and if it meets all of the requirements, a permit will be issued. Permits expire on July 1 of each year, unless the appropriate annual renewal fees are paid on or before June 30. Annual renewal fees are based on size and are listed below.

Size (sq. ft.)	Fee
1-375	$15
376-999	$25
More than 1000	$50

General prohibitions

In addition to the zoning and spacing requirements discussed later in this guide, the following general prohibitions apply to billboards visible from interstate highways.

1. No billboard may encroach on or hang over the highway right of way.
2. No billboard may be lighted so it impairs the vision of any motor vehicle driver.
3. No billboard may obstruct the view of any highway or railroad to the extent it makes it dangerous to use the highway.
4. No billboard may imitate or resemble an official traffic control sign, signal or device.
5. No billboard may obscure or physically interfere with an official traffic control sign, signal or device.

6. No billboard shall include flashing, intermittent or moving lights, except those providing public service information such as time, date, temperature, weather, and news.
7. No new billboard shall be located beyond 660 feet from the right of way in the rural areas and visible from the main traveled way.

Scenic byways

The erection of billboards is prohibited along any state or nationally designated scenic byway. Existing permitted billboards along scenic byways may remain in existence, provided that appropriate permit fees are remitted in a timely manner and no relocation or reconstruction of the billboard occurs.

Property zoning requirements

The property at the proposed billboard location must be zoned commercial or industrial. The following conditions are not sufficient in meeting this requirement.

- Commercial or industrial areas that are not regulated by comprehensive zoning in accordance with Iowa Code chapters 335 or 414.
- Areas rezoned from a noncommercial or nonindustrial classification to a commercial or industrial classification for the primary purpose of securing approval for outdoor advertising.
- A zone in which limited commercial or industrial activities are permitted incidental to other primary land uses. This may include mixed-use zoning classifications, commercial/noncommercial hybrids, and some commercial classifications that allow the development of noncommercial activities and restrict the development of generally accepted commercial activities.

Property land use requirements

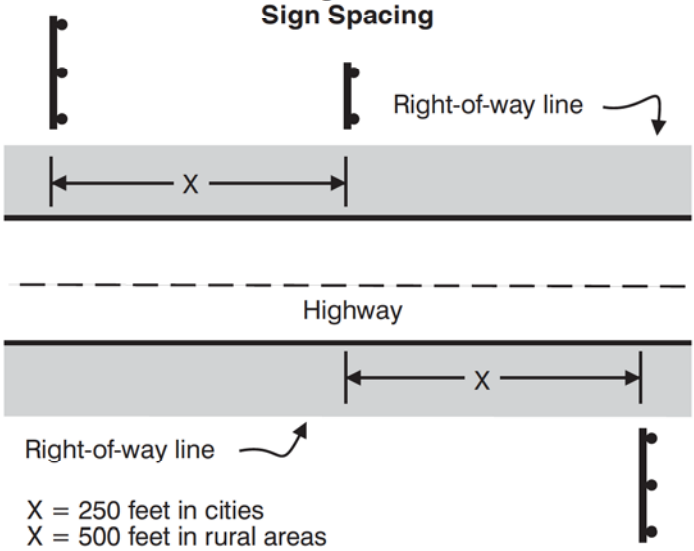
The property where the billboard is proposed must be used for commercial or industrial purposes. For this requirement to be met, at least one commercial or industrial activity must be located on the property assessed as commercial or industrial, and meets the following conditions.

- The activity must be located on the same individual platted parcel of land as the proposed billboard site.
- The activity must be one defined as commercial or industrial under the local zoning ordinance.
- The activity must be visible from the interstate highway.
- The activity must be staffed at least 20 hours per week, with the hours of operation visibly posted on the premises. A rental storage business is exempt from this requirement if it has 24-hour access for customers and a minimum of 50 units, each occupying at least 50 square feet, individually separated and enclosed by walls.
- The proposed billboard site must be within 750 feet of the "regularly used" portion of the activity. "Regularly used" means that portion meets the conditions listed above.

Spacing requirements

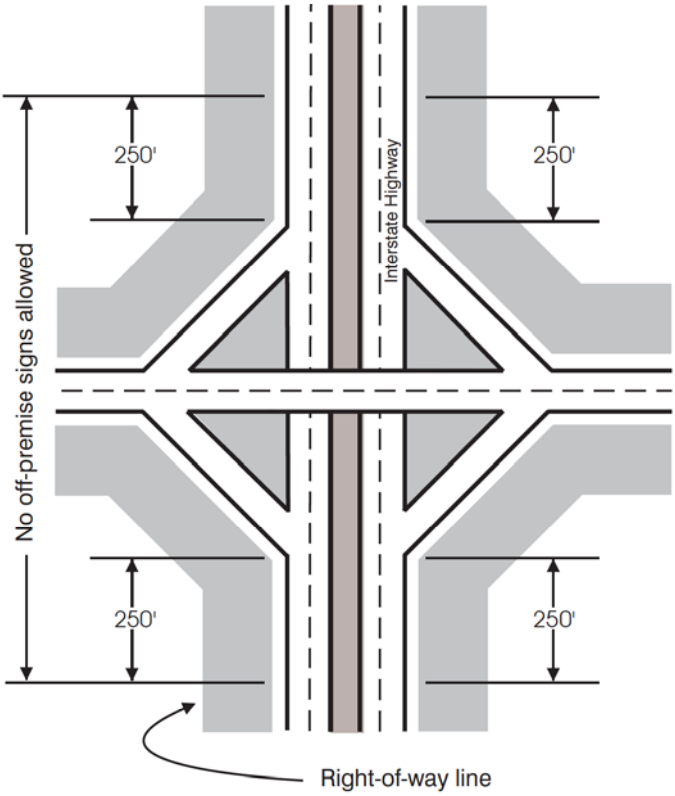
In cities, billboards must be located a minimum of 250 feet from any other billboard facing the same direction, regardless of which side of the highway the billboard is located. In rural areas, billboards must be located a minimum of 500 feet from any other billboard facing the same direction, regardless of which side of the highway the sign is located. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1
Sign Spacing



Billboards cannot be located within an interchange area. The interchange area includes all property within the adjacent area and within 250 feet of whichever ramp taper extends the farthest from the interchange (see Figure 2). If two interchanges in close proximity have continuous on-/off-ramps that do not require traffic to merge with the main traveled way, the entire area between the interchanges is not eligible for the placement of billboards.

Figure 2
Off-Premise Signs
Within an Interchange Area



Size requirements

The display area (face) of a single-faced billboard is limited to a maximum of 1200 square feet. For billboards facing more than one direction, the display areas are limited to a maximum of 750 square-feet-per-direction.

Light emitting diode (LED) displays

LED displays are permitted under the following conditions.

- Adding this type of technology for an existing billboard constitutes a billboard "modification" under Iowa law. Therefore, a new permit application is required.
- Each change of message must be accomplished in one second or less.
- Each message must remain in a fixed position for at least eight seconds.
- No traveling messages (e.g., moving messages, animated messages, full-motion video, or scrolling text messages) or segmented messages are presented.
- The intensity of the illumination does not cause glare or impair the vision of the driver of any motor vehicle or otherwise interferes with any driver's operation of a motor vehicle.
- LED displays must be located a minimum of 500 feet from any other LED display facing the same direction within cities. LED displays must be located a minimum of 1000 feet from any other LED display facing the same direction in rural areas.

Local regulations

Local laws, regulations or ordinances may be more restrictive than state regulations. Applicants must to adhere to both sets of regulations when applying for billboard permits. A local zoning authority signature is required on the state permit application certifying the zoning classification for the proposed site.

Frequently asked questions

Q. If billboards are not allowed in the agricultural areas, why have some of them been allowed to remain there?

A. These billboards were built prior to passage of Iowa's Billboard Control Law in 1972. They applied for and received permits to remain in place as (grandfathered) nonconforming signs. If the permit fees are paid each year, and the billboards are not modified or reconstructed, the billboards may remain in existence at their locations.

Q. Is there a setback or safe distance where I can place my billboard along the interstate without being subject to control?

A. Due to existence of some billboards that were built beyond 660 feet from the interstate right-of-way line, it would be natural to assume this is the setback requirement. Actually, many of these in rural areas were built before passage of Iowa's Billboard Control Law in 1972 and are now considered (grandfathered) nonconforming signs. In these areas, new billboards are actually prohibited beyond 660 feet, if they are visible from the interstate. However, billboards in the city limits built beyond 660 feet from the interstate right-of-way line are not subject to control.

Q. I've heard that if I place my advertisement on a licensed trailer or vehicle located on my property, it is exempt from these regulations. Is this true?

A. No. The definition of an outdoor advertising device is contained in Iowa Code chapter 306C and makes no exemption for signs mounted on vehicles, if they are serving in the same capacity as a traditional advertising device. If the message itself qualifies as an off-premise message, it is subject to control, regardless of the type of supporting device used.

Q. Are there any conforming locations still available along the interstate?

A. Opportunities are limited due to the rural character of much of the interstate system in Iowa. However, when new areas are developed commercially, this opens up new possibilities.

Q. I own property along the interstate. Shouldn't I be able to advertise my own business on it without a state permit?

A. It depends on whether that business is located on the same property as the proposed advertising sign. If it is, then your proposed sign may qualify as an on-premise sign. You should contact the Iowa DOT's advertising management section to verify its status before proceeding with installation. If the business is not located on the same property, the sign will still need to meet all of the requirements for a billboard permit.

WHERE TO OBTAIN APPLICATION FORMS AND INFORMATION

Advertising Management
Office of Traffic and Safety
Iowa Department of Transportation
800 Lincoln Way
Ames, IA 50010
Phone: 515-239-1296
Website: www.iowadot.gov/iowaroadsigns

Federal and state laws prohibit employment and/or public accommodation discrimination on the basis of age, color, creed, disability, gender identity, national origin, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran's status. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please contact the Iowa Civil Rights Commission at 800-457-4416 or Iowa Department of Transportation's affirmative action officer. If you need accommodations because of a disability to access the Iowa Department of Transportation's services, contact the agency's affirmative action officer at 800-262-0003.

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