Service Signing and Motorist's Choice

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The purpose of this research was to determine the effect of supplemental service information signing on the rural Interstate System in Ohio. The basis for this determination was motorist use measured directly and indirectly. Variations in service facility use patterns were taken as a direct measure of motorist use. Questionnaires, distributed by each service facility, were designed so that motorist use could be inferred indirectly through the measurement of variations in motorist awareness of service availability. The results of this study are based on a series of before-and-after analyses of data collected at five signed interchanges and five unsigned interchanges.

The primary conclusions are that the use of supplemental service signing increases the Interstate traveler's awareness of service availability and that this advance information is utilized. The latter conclusion was substantiated by an overall increase in the service facility use at signed interchanges, an increase in gasoline credit card use at signed interchanges, and an increase in the number of gallons of gasoline in the automobiles of motorists stopping to refill at signed interchanges.

*THE Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1958 provides for a 13-year program of federal-state cooperation to complete the most important highway system in the United States, the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. This new highway system is being built and operated under a strict set of standards. Sharp curves and steep grades are prohibited wherever possible, as are railroad grade crossings and at-grade intersections.

The system is identified by a special route marker series, and all signing is specifically identified by type, message, and color. Advertising signs are not allowed within a corridor extending 660 ft on either side of the centerline, except at business locations.

Provisions were made to allow the use of standard "Gas-Food-Lodging" signs in advance of interchanges offering these services. However, this method does not supply the Interstate user with any information concerning the particular identity of the services available. Many of today's travelers have definite preferences as to which brand of gas, food, and lodging they use, possibly due to the increasing use of credit cards.

The nation's legislators recognize that today's Interstate user may desire, and more importantly may need, more specific information related to the services available at rural interchanges. The Highway Beautification Act of 1965 contained the following paragraph:

The House accepted the Senate number and enabling clause and struck out all other language and substituted its own language which did include the amendment by Senator Cooper that service signing be provided on the Interstate System to give the public information as to food, fuel, and lodging, and that Trade names, Trade marks, etc., be used for this purpose.
Before the concept of service signing can become a reality, certain questions must be answered. What is the maximum number of services that can be included on each sign? What is the maximum distance from the interchange that a service can be located and still be included in the program? These are just two of the questions that must be answered before a service-signing program can become operative.

However, there is a more fundamental question that highway administrators must consider first: Does the motorist need supplemental service signing? The determination of motorist need is a very difficult and complex task. One approach that would be of value to the highway administrator in this determination is to gauge motorist use as an indirect measure of need. The design of this study was directed toward this end—the determination of motorist use.

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It was also the intention of this research to define the relationship between the effect of service signing and the location of the service facility or its distance from the Interstate. This determination was to aid in the formulation of warrants governing the use of supplemental service signing if this signing was determined beneficial to the Interstate traveler.

A complete inventory of the services available at rural interchanges was taken preceding the selection of test sites. This inventory included all services within 1.5 miles on each side of Ohio's 111 interchanges. The survey indicated that over 90 percent of the available services were located within ¼ mile of the Interstate. This fact, coupled with Ohio's relatively flat terrain, meant that the majority of service facilities were visible to the motorist as he made his exit from the Interstate. This compactness and visibility rendered any relationship between service signing and distance from the interchange virtually meaningless. Therefore, the objective was confined to the determination of motorist use.

PROCEDURE

Selection of Test Sites

Ten interchanges were selected as test sites for investigation. Six of these were located successively on I-71 north of Columbus, and the remaining four were located successively on I-75 south of Dayton. Five of the ten interchanges were chosen as study sites: three interchanges on I-71 and two on I-75. These interchanges were signed with the service signing, supplementing the standard "Gas-Food-Lodging" signing. The remaining five interchanges were used as control sites, receiving no supplemental signing.

Every attempt was made to equalize the number of the three types of services available at the study site interchanges and the control site interchanges. An attempt was also made to equalize the distribution of name brand services between the study and control interchanges. Strip maps of I-71 and I-75 showing the service facilities by type and location are included in the Appendix.

Sign Design

Two separate signs were designed for this study, the first to include gas information and the second food and lodging information. The design of these signs was the result of a cooperative effort between the Bureau of Traffic and the HOP Committee (Highway Oil Planners), an ad hoc committee made up of representatives of the Highway Department, Oil Industry, Motel Association, and Restaurant Association, whose function is the resolution of mutual problems created by the overlapping activities of the member groups.
The identification of gasoline service facilities was accomplished by using company emblems only. A maximum of 6 emblem panels per sign were permitted for this study. The overall dimensions of the sign displaying the maximum number of panels were 9 by 14 ft. The use of color was permitted for the emblem design, while the sign background was the standard Interstate blue color (Fig. 1).

Legend and/or emblems were permitted in the identification of food and lodging service facilities. The maximum dimensions of the "Food-Lodging" sign were 14 by 20 ft. This design permitted eight legend panels, a maximum of four for either service. The color design of this sign was white on blue (Fig. 2).

Method of Data Collection

The data collected for analysis were of three main types: (a) manual vehicular movement counts at each interchange; (b) questionnaire distribution at each service facility; and (c) spot speed determination at all study site interchanges.

Data collection for each of the three phases was conducted simultaneously in the before-and-after testing periods. The before testing periods extended from the third week in November 1966 through the second week of February 1967. The after testing period began the second week of March 1967 and ended in the first week of June 1967.

The vehicular movement counts were conducted on one side of an interchange at a time. These counts were taken in one-hour segments varying between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The actual number of hours of use counts and the particular hours of the day that they represented were held constant for the before and after testing periods at each interchange. A minimum of 10 hours of counts were collected on each side of an interchange.

Figure 3 shows the types of typical vehicular movements that were recorded. Several distinct movements can be identified as they were utilized to compute the percentages for the service facility use analyses. These percentages are as follows:

1. Ramp use—raw number of vehicles using the exit ramp (movement 1, Fig. 3);
2. Turning percentage—percent of vehicles turning from exit ramp toward the available services on that side of the interchange ($\% = \text{movement 3} / \text{movement 1}$);
3. Service facility use percentage—percent of vehicles described (2) that enter any service facility ($\% = \text{movement 4} / \text{movement 3}$); and
Figure 3. Description of use analyses variables by vehicle movement type.

4. Specific service facility use patterns—percent of vehicles described (2) that enter either a gas service facility or a "Food-Lodging" service facility (% = movement 4a or 4b ÷ movement 3).

The questionnaire distribution was accomplished with the cooperation of the management of each service facility. The distribution and collection of questionnaires was made the responsibility of the employees of each service facility. This involved the distribution of 100 questionnaires by each service facility in both testing periods at all study and control interchanges.

Separate questionnaires (Appendix) were designed for each of the three service facility types, but each delivered the following basic information about the motorist for analysis:

1. Direction of travel prior to entering the service facility to determine exposure to the supplemental service signing;
2. Degree of use of the interchange (frequent, occasional, or first time) to establish interchange familiarity; and
3. Knowledge of the existence of this particular service facility prior to leaving the Interstate.

Only those questionnaires completed by motorists traveling on the Interstate were retained for analysis. In order to eliminate the bias created by interchange familiarity, the sample was further refined to include only those questionnaires completed by motorists using an interchange for the first time. This procedure reduced the questionnaire sample size from 8728 to 1388.

The questionnaires distributed at the gasoline service facilities rendered two additional pieces of information that were used in the analysis. The first was the amount of gasoline in the tank when the motorist stopped to refill. The second concerned the use of a credit card toward this purchase.

Daytime spot speed checks were taken in advance of the supplemental service signing to ascertain the detrimental effect, if any, of the sign design on traffic flow. These checks were made approximately 350 ft in advance of each sign and, as a measure of control, approximately 1 1/2 miles in advance of each interchange having supplemental service signing. This same procedure was followed in the before period, using the proposed location of each sign as the spot speed check site. The control interchanges were not surveyed in this phase of the study.

Description of Analysis

The overall analysis was designed to answer the following specific questions:

1. Were the ramp use patterns altered following the installation of the supplemental service signing?
2. Were the service facility use patterns altered following the installation of the supplemental service signing?
3. What effect did name brand have on these use patterns?
4. Did supplemental service signing provide the motorist using a particular service facility with any additional advance information?
5. Did supplemental service signing influence the motorist's decision of when to leave the Interstate to obtain gasoline?
6. Did supplemental service signing influence credit card use at gasoline service facilities?
7. Did the supplemental service sign design have any effect on the Interstate speeds?
Table 1 gives a summary of the variables used, the data source for each variable, and the statistical analysis employed with each. Several terms used under "Variable Tested" require some further explanation.

The analysis involving the service facility use percentage was used to determine the effect of supplemental service signing averaged across all gasoline service facilities and all food-lodging facilities. The chi-square analysis involving the better-known vs lesser-known use was employed to determine if this overall effect was related to the presence of brand-name facilities. With respect to food and lodging facilities, better-known facilities were defined as those under chain operation while lesser-known were those operated independently. This determination of better-known and lesser-known for the gasoline service facilities was less obvious. Of the nine different oil companies operating facilities at the ten interchanges included in this project, three operated over half of all the gasoline service facilities in Ohio. It was assumed that these three were better-known than the six remaining oil companies.

The term "awareness percentage" refers to the percent of the Interstate travelers using an interchange for the first time and giving an affirmative response to the "knowledge" question: Did you know this particular service was located here when you pulled off the Interstate? Insufficient sample size prevented any individual statistical analysis of the questionnaires completed at motels.

The term "gasoline tank residual" refers to the number of gallons of gasoline in the automobiles of those Interstate travelers stopping to obtain gasoline and using an interchange for the first time. These data were obtained indirectly from the questionnaire responses. Each interviewee was asked to supply the make and year of the automobile and the number of gallons purchased. This information, used in conjunction with detailed automobile specifications supplied by the Automobile Manufacturers Association, was used to compute the variable of "gasoline tank residual."

The spot speed was conducted by computing the speed variation for each service sign location. The speed variation was defined as the difference in the change in mean speed at the sign location and the corresponding no-sign location. A negative value of the speed variation would indicate that the mean speed did decrease in the approach to a supplemental service sign:

\[ \text{Speed Variation} = (\overline{V}_{b} - \overline{V}_{a})_{\text{no sign}} - (\overline{V}_{b} - \overline{V}_{a})_{\text{sign}} \]
### Table 2
**SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS RESULTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Variable Tested</th>
<th>Significance&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle count</td>
<td>Percent change in exit ramp volume</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle count</td>
<td>Turning percentage</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle count</td>
<td>Service facility use percentage—total</td>
<td>Yes (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle count</td>
<td>Service facility use percentage—gasoline</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle count</td>
<td>Service facility use percentage—food-lodging</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle count</td>
<td>&quot;Better-known vs lesser-known&quot; use—gasoline</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle count</td>
<td>&quot;Better-known vs lesser-known&quot; use—food-lodging</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Service facility awareness percentage—total</td>
<td>Yes (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Service facility awareness percentage—gasoline</td>
<td>Yes (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Service facility awareness percentage—food</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Service facility awareness percentage—lodging</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Credit card use percentage—gasoline</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Credit card use vs supplemental service signing</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Level of Significance = 0.05; (+) indicates increase in after period.

Then, this variable of speed variation was plotted against the variable of number of messages per sign type to determine their relationship. Also, the average difference in the before-and-after mean speeds at the signed locations was compared with the average difference at the no-sign location.

**RESULTS**

Table 2 gives a general summary of the results in terms of statistical significance. Figures 4 through 9 show the results in numerical terms.

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**Figure 4.** Summary of service facility use data at study interchanges.

**Figure 5.** Summary of service facility use data at control interchanges.
The primary results of the analyses with respect to the variables tested were the following:

1. The increase in exit ramp volume at signed interchanges (27 percent) was not statistically different from the increase at unsigned interchanges (16 percent).

2. There was an increase in total service facility use at the signed interchanges but not at the unsigned interchanges (Figs. 4 and 5). This increase at signed interchanges was the product of an increase in gasoline service facility use averaged with a "no-change" result at the food-lodging facilities. The "no-change" effect at the unsigned interchanges was the result of a significant increase at the gasoline service facilities compensated by a significant decrease in use at the food-lodging facilities.

3. The variable of name brand (better-known vs lesser-known) was found to have no effect on the service facility use patterns at either the signed or unsigned interchanges (Table 3).

4. The awareness percentage increased significantly at both the signed and unsigned interchanges. Figure 6 indicates that the increase at the signed interchanges was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Test Period</th>
<th>Intersection Type</th>
<th>Awareness Percentage</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20 40 60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gasoline</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>183</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>After</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Motel</td>
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<td>Study</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Awareness percentage of first-time interchange users.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interchange</th>
<th>Service Facility</th>
<th>Brand Name</th>
<th>No. of Facility Users</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed</td>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>Better-known</td>
<td>303 405</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesser-known</td>
<td>159 246</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsigned</td>
<td>Food-Lodging</td>
<td>Better-known</td>
<td>454 549</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesser-known</td>
<td>66 101</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>Better-known</td>
<td>199 268</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesser-known</td>
<td>75 122</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food-Lodging</td>
<td>Better-known</td>
<td>256 228</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesser-known</td>
<td>119 97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There was a significant increase in the average amount of gasoline in the automobiles of those motorists leaving the Interstate to obtain gasoline at unfamiliar but signed interchanges. There was no statistical change in this variable at the unsigned interchanges (Fig. 7).

6. Gasoline credit card use increased at signed interchanges but not at unsigned interchanges (Fig. 8).

7. The mean Interstate spot speeds were not affected by the presence of supplemental service signing (Fig. 9). However, there was an indication of a relationship between number of messages per sign and Interstate speed. This relationship should be considered in the determination of the sign design. Sign design is one phase of the concept of supplemental service signing that merits further research.

The results of the awareness percentage analysis indicate that the Interstate traveler stopping at signed interchanges was provided with more advance information than those choosing to stop at unsigned interchanges. The analysis of the service facility use patterns indicates that this additional information did influence the interchange distribution (result No. 2), but not the name brand distribution (result No. 3).

The results of the restaurant and motel service facility use analyses indicated that it was this group of users that influenced the overall interchange redistribution. The
restaurant and motel service facility use at signed interchanges remained constant follow­ing the installation of the supplemental service signing, while a significant decrease in use was recorded at the unsigned interchanges. These use results were interpreted as the results of a combination of two factors: first, the presence of supplemental service signing and, second, an outside factor unaccounted for or undefined in this study. The presence of this unaccounted-for factor in the after period resulted in a general decline in use at all restaurant and motel facilities during the data sampling periods. But, the addition of supplemental service signing at selected interchanges within a system of interchanges produced a redistribution of users from the unsigned to the signed interchanges, thus aiding the general decline in use at the unsigned interchanges while offsetting it at the signed interchanges.

In reviewing the results of gasoline service facility use analyses for signed and unsigned interchanges (i.e., identical significant increases of 2 percentage points), it must be noted that all gasoline service facilities employed the on-premise, highrise advertising towers. These results plus those pertaining to the service facility awareness, the credit card use, and the gasoline tank residual were interpreted in the following manner. The use pattern was not affected by the supplemental service signing because today's motorists have definite brand preferences. Many of these motorists, in approaching a signed interchange and being given the names of the available services as well as the distance to the next interchange, made the conscious decision not to stop in the hope that their brand would be available at the next interchange. However, the additional decision-making time and information concerning total service availability provided by supplemental service signing did benefit some motorists. This is evidenced by the motorists stopping at unfamiliar but signed interchanges with an increased awareness of service availability, increased gasoline residual, and an increased use of credit cards.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions have been reached regarding the effect of supplemental service signing:

1. The awareness of the Interstate traveler of the existence of specific service facilities is increased by using supplemental service signing.

2. The advance information afforded by supplemental service signing is used by the Interstate traveler as evidenced by: (a) the increase in the service facility use percentage at the signed interchanges; (b) the increase in the amount of gasoline in the tanks of those Interstate travelers stopping at unfamiliar but signed interchanges; and (c) the increase in credit card use at gasoline service facilities at signed interchanges.

3. The overall distribution of service facility users between better-known and lesser-known facilities is not altered by the use of supplemental service signing.

4. Based on the results of the spot speed analysis, the basic sign design used in this study is adequate.

REFERENCES


Appendix

SERVICE FACILITY DISTRIBUTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Facility Type</th>
<th>Service Signage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gasoline</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LEGEND

I-75 South

SR 73
SR 123
SR 122
SR 63

I-71 North

SR 250
SR 13
SR 97
SR 95
SR 61
SR 36637

Miles

0.5 0.4 0.3 0.2 0.1 0.0 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 0.5 0.6
## Typical Questionnaires by Facility Type

### "GAS"

**STATE OF OHIO**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS**  
**BUREAU OF TRAFFIC DRIVER QUESTIONNAIRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time AM PM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. **MAKE OF AUTOMOBILE**:  
   Year: ____

2. **IS THIS AUTOMOBILE LICENSED IN OHIO?**  
   Yes, No: __

3. **YOU ARE DOING WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING?**  
   a. continuing on the interstate: ________  
   b. entering the interstate: ________  
   c. leaving the interstate: ________  
   d. not traveling on the interstate: ________

4. **HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE THIS INTERCHANGE?**  
   a. frequently: ________  
   b. occasionally: ________  
   c. first time: ________

5. **DID YOU KNOW THAT THIS PARTICULAR SERVICE STATION WAS LOCATED HERE WHEN YOU PULLED OFF THE INTERSTATE?**  
   Yes, No: __

6. **DID YOU USE A CREDIT CARD FOR THIS PURCHASE?**  
   Yes, No: __

7. **HOW MANY GALLONS OF GASOLINE DID YOU PURCHASE?**  
   ________ GALLONS

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### "FOOD"

**STATE OF OHIO**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS**  
**BUREAU OF TRAFFIC DRIVER QUESTIONNAIRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time AM PM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. **YOU ARE DOING WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING?**  
   a. continuing on the interstate: ________  
   b. leaving the interstate: ________  
   c. entering the interstate: ________  
   d. not traveling on the interstate: ________

2. **HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE THIS INTERCHANGE?**  
   a. frequently: ________  
   b. occasionally: ________  
   c. first time: ________

3. **WHY DID YOU STOP AT THIS RESTAURANT?**  
   a. coffee: ________  
   b. snack: ________  
   c. meal: ________

4. **DID YOU KNOW THAT THIS RESTAURANT WAS LOCATED HERE WHEN YOU PULLED OFF THE INTERSTATE?**  
   Yes, No: __

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### "LODGING"

**STATE OF OHIO**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS**  
**BUREAU OF TRAFFIC DRIVER QUESTIONNAIRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time AM PM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. **YOU ARE DOING WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING?**  
   a. continuing on the interstate: ________  
   b. leaving the interstate: ________  
   c. entering the interstate: ________  
   d. not traveling on the interstate: ________

2. **HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE THIS INTERCHANGE?**  
   a. frequently: ________  
   b. occasionally: ________  
   c. first time: ________

3. **DID YOU KNOW THAT THIS PARTICULAR MOTEL WAS LOCATED HERE WHEN YOU PULLED OFF THE INTERSTATE?**  
   Yes, No: __

4. **DID YOU HAVE A RESERVATION AT THIS MOTEL?**  
   Yes, No: __