

VERMONT'S TRAVEL INFORMATION SYSTEM

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Vermonters think of their State as a special world, or at least as a place with a special way of life. They see in it a place where nature sets the pace of life, and where preservation of environmental values receives priority in all decisions relating to man-made development. They see nothing in this arrangement that is inconsistent with economic growth. Indeed, they feel it is essential to achieving the kind of economic growth they desire in the tourism and outdoor recreation industries, and the development of vacation homes on economically and ecologically sound bases.

Highway travel is an integral factor in all plans, public and private, for development and enjoyment of Vermont's outdoor resources. Inevitably this has meant that roadside signs have multiplied in areas where they could be expected to catch the visitor's eye.

In Vermont, all roadside signs, with the exception of the route markers and other official signs maintained by the highway authorities, have been or are soon to be removed. In 1968 the State legislature decided it was time for a basic change in the appearance of the roadside by removal of the outdoor advertising signs, and for the inauguration of a new system of signing designed specifically to meet the motorist's informational needs. Under the terms of this legislation the Secretary of State, and later the Agency of Development and Community Affairs and the Highway Department, were delegated a substantial degree of leeway in designing a new system for providing travel information for users of Vermont highways. The legislature also established a Travel Information Council, authorizing it to serve as the policy-making body for this new activity as the State's agencies implemented their legislative directive.

To commence designing its new system of signing, the Council contracted for the assistance of Paul Arthur, a consultant who at that time had recently designed an innovative new system of signage for EXPO 67 in Montreal, and was full of enthusiasm for the opportunity provided by Vermont's decision. After considerable research, the consultant produced a report on the design concept, and a series of signboard mockups making use of symbols and color-codes, as well as words and numbers, to present in limited signboard space the types of information judged to be necessary for various categories of needs.

Consideration of the principal existing systems of sign symbols, such as the international road signing devices, led to suggestions for modifications with the hope of improvement. For example, food service establishments are noted by a knife and fork. However, it was suggested for Vermont that they be arranged in a parallel pattern instead of the usual crossed fashion. In this case the parallel pattern was considered easier to identify. (See Figure 7)



Figure 1. Some signs are plain.



Figure 2. Some signs are pleasing.

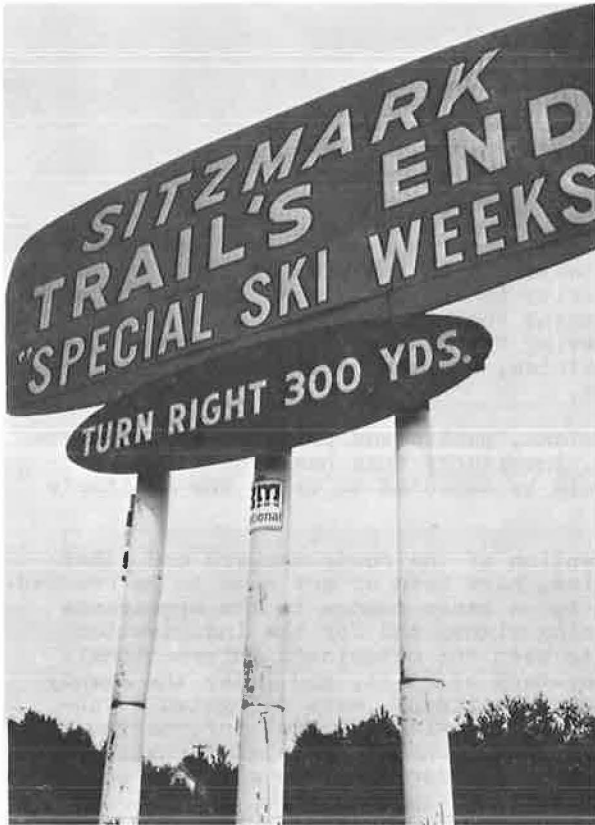


Figure 3. Some signs have emphasized their sales message.



Figure 4. Others have provided route information, but have erred in attempting to give too much at one time.



Figure 5. In contrast to the official signs, characterized by functional design, some signs have been bizarre. These evoke strong reactions, either for or against.



Figure 6. Many signs do not tell the motorist what he wants to know as he travels, but rather what the signowner wants to tell him.

of information on a single panel. We did not wish to have the series of sign panels grow to the point where it resembled the old-time "Burma-Shave" boards lined up along the edge of the highway.

The series of symbols which was developed by the consultant covered a wide range of activities, substantially more than those for which traffic engineering manuals offered graphic prototypes. Some proved to be particularly difficult to represent in simple graphic form. Initial designs were tried out on the traveling public in laboratory tests and highway demonstrations, and modifications were made in the light of public comprehension and acceptance of the symbols and color codes.

Sign panels were erected at intervals of 200 ft (60.96 meters) along the highway. However, aesthetic considerations led to combining more than one category



Figure 7. Restaurant facilities are shown under their own distinctive knife-and-fork symbol.



Figure 8. Lodgings have their distinctive symbol.



Figure 9. Recreation facilities were given separate symbols for subcategories.



Figure 10. Automotive service establishments have logograms showing brand names of products sold.



Figure 11. The symbol for miscellaneous goods and services is a graphic representation of a package. Experience may suggest a more descriptive symbol for this category.



Figure 13. Experience determined what items of information were essential, and how presentation could be facilitated.



Figure 12. Initial tests were concerned with information overloads on signs.

When Vermont inaugurated its demonstration project on this type of signing, Highway District No. 2, in the southeast-corner of the State was selected as the site. Into this corner of the State came most of Vermont's tourist travel; here was where these travelers would receive their orientation to the State's highway network, its outdoor recreation resources, and the travel service industry and facilities of the State.

The demonstration project made use of the combination signs illustrated in Figure 12. However, the tests made with five sign panels mounted on a single panel board were not satisfactory. Even with the use of color-coding and graphic symbols, this was too much information -- too many "bits" of information, as the communications specialists call each of the syllables, combinations of numbers, and various other graphic symbols contained on a sign.

Accordingly, changes were made. The top panel, which had contained the category symbols, was eliminated. The number of individual directional signs was limited to three per assembly. Color coding was restricted to the symbols themselves. And use of symbols was made optional at the discretion of the business using the sign. As a result of the changes made following the initial period of experimentation, the signs adopted by Vermont for statewide use took the form of those shown in Figure 13.



Figure 14. Information sign plazas may be provided in conjunction with safety rest areas.



Figure 15. Advance notice must consider customary travel speeds.



Figure 16. Advance notice signs provide directional information as well as substantive information.



Figure 17. Information sign plazas in rural areas carry a full range of travel-oriented data.



Figure 18. Sign plazas at entrances to built-up areas index facilities in the local community.



Figure 19. Information sign plazas operated in conjunction with part-time manned information centers extend services offered to motorists.



Figure 20. General information about State tourist attractions cover one side of information plaza signboard.



Figure 21. Road map and listings of local area lodgings, restaurants, automotive services and resorts are provided on reverse side of information plaza signboard.



Figure 22. Entering Vermont on I-91 from Massachusetts, a traveller arrives at the Guilford Welcome Center.



Figure 23. In addition to its manned information building, the Guilford Welcome Center has an information sign plaza.



Figure 24. Inside the building a visitor may obtain a guidebook, a State highway map, and specific information in response to his questions.



Figure 25. Since manned information buildings are not open 24 hours a day, supplementary information facilities are provided in the form of directory boards and sign plazas.

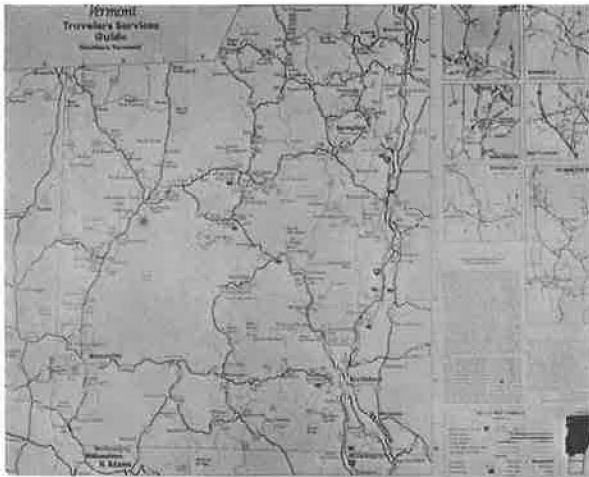


Figure 26. "Mini-maps", containing detailed information of the vicinity, are provided in dispensers at the sign plaza, and serve as guides to travel-oriented services available in the area.

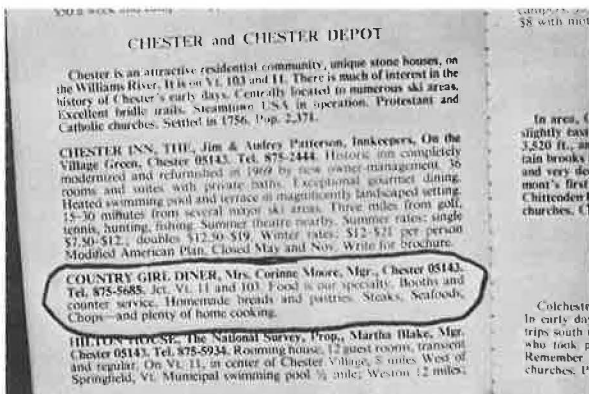


Figure 28. With guidebooks and maps, a traveller may select from a choice of facilities described for his consideration. Current editions of the guidebook use symbols in conjunction with descriptions of facilities, and so facilitate rapid scanning of pages for desired types of services.

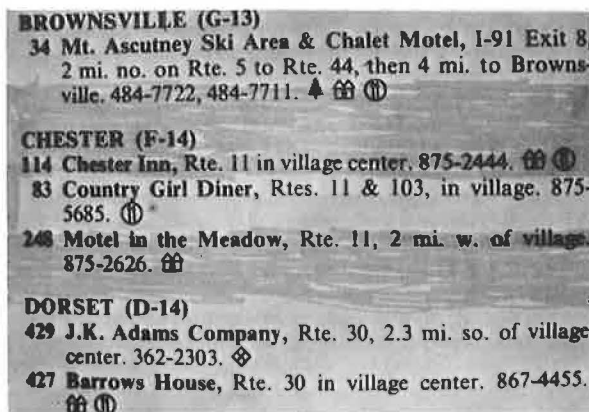


Figure 30. The same establishment may be listed on the reverse side of a "mini-map" with its code symbols and directional information.



Figure 27. At Guilford Welcome Center, travellers may obtain regional maps of Vermont. Prepared by the Vermont Travel Information Council, these maps show locations of local businesses and other tourist information. Although these maps are prepared from the State's base highway map, some highway information is deleted to allow maximizing tourist information.



Figure 29. Nearing the vicinity of an establishment selected from the guidebook, a traveller may also find the establishment listed in the displays of an information plaza.

Figure 13 illustrates what is perhaps the most complex individual official business directional signboard that the motorist will encounter in Vermont's new information sign system. It offers the advertiser an opportunity to display his identity either by a standard symbol or by his own business logogram ("logo"). Or he may choose to have no graphic device of any kind on his sign. The appearance of the sign has been standardized with white reflectorized lettering on a plain black background. Signs are limited in number by setting locational criteria. These may limit the signs to the same town in which the advertised business is located, or to points within the vicinity of the business where instruction is needed on change of direction to reach it.



Figure 31. On the face of the "mini-map" the location of each listed business is shown by numbers. If the location is on a roadway that is so minor that it is not on the highway map, it is shown with reference to the exact point on the main highway where one turns off the main highway to reach it.

Hardship variances from these rules are authorized by the statute. Accordingly, where the particular configuration of roads in an area might tend to confuse a traveler, an additional sign might be posted even though no change of direction is involved. With approval of the Federal Highway Administration, Vermont will implement this system of signs on all of the State's primary and secondary roads.

On limited access highways and in areas of congested intersections, the Vermont Travel Information Council utilizes information plazas. Advance notice signs are posted to give the location of these plazas and mileage data. On Interstate highways these signs use white lettering on dark blue background; on Federal Aid Primary highways and secondary, they use white lettering on a black background. The signboards are relatively small in size, and resort to use of symbols to indicate the types of information available at the plaza.

Information sign plazas are located in both rural areas and built-up locations. (Figures 17 and 18) In the latter locations particular care is necessary in selection of sites. There must be places where advance notice signs can be posted; the sites must be accessible and visible from the highway, and must offer adequate parking space. Where possible, sign plazas have been located so as to complement existing sources of travel information, such as part-time information booths operated by local chambers of commerce or other local groups. (Figure 19)

Winter snow-plowing as well as summer maintenance must be provided for sign plazas. Maintenance during summer months -- when the summer tourist season is at its height -- consists chiefly of cleaning signboards and keeping map dispensers supplied with maps. Telephone facilities add to the value of information plazas whenever they are provided. Funding for general information displays concerning points of interest in the State is provided by revenue from sale of advertising space on the reverse side of the signboard. (See Figures 20 and 21.) The fee for a permit to display an advertising plaque, measuring 6 x 6 inches in size, is \$50.00, the same amount charged an advertiser for a panel on one of the State's roadside directional signboards. This permit is renewable annually with a fee of \$33.00. Currently, revenue from permits or other charges is reported to cover operating costs of the sign plazas.

Under the terms of its present law, Vermont will remove all private roadside advertising except on-premise signs and a few directional signs. Travel information will be provided by a combination of information centers, guidebooks and maps, information sign plazas, and official directional signs. Vermonters feel that this combination of infor-



Figure 32. Using information from maps and directories, a traveller may be guided to the location of a selected establishment, recognizing it by its on-premise sign.

mational services will provide visitors better data and directions regarding tourist facilities and travel-oriented attractions than heretofore has been provided by unrestricted outdoor advertising signs. And, needless to add, Vermonters also see the elimination of off-premise billboards as a step in the direction of preserving the type of visual environment that attracts recreational visitors and enhances the pleasure of living in their State.

Vermont's system is unique among the States at the present time. It may be adaptable to the circumstances and policies of other States, or others may wish to modify it in various ways. Certainly it is expected that it will be modified in Vermont as experience is acquired. One example of a desirable modification may be with respect to the number of official roadside directional signs permitted for any one establishment. Initially the number of such signs was limited to four per business. Now, however, the Travel Information Council has adopted a more liberal policy on this matter, and permits more than four signs when the need for more is demonstrated. Another innovation resulting from operational experience with roadside directional signs is the practice of posting so-called "trailblazer" emblems along the lesser roads leading to tourist resorts and other travel objectives in remote locations. These emblems are a second generation development of the logo sign concept, and are smaller than the regular roadside directional signs.

The system of information services and facilities described above is administered by the Vermont Travel Information Council, a public agency created by the State legislature especially for this function. Vermont was the first State to have such an agency, and since its initial action three other States have created similar Councils. Day-to-day administration of the information program in Vermont is centered in nine District Committees of the Council. Decisions of these committees are appealable to the Council itself; and decisions of the Council are appealable to the State Supreme Court. Organizationally the Council is attached to the State's Agency of Development and Community Affairs. While this connection may not seem typical as compared with the organization adopted by other States in their billboard control programs, it has served in Vermont to emphasize the positive aspects of that State's program, and has encouraged interest in viewing it as an advance in the evolution of travel information services.

NEBRASKA'S INTERSTATE TRAVEL INFORMATION SYSTEM

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I would like to outline Nebraska's tourism program as it directly relates to the highway traveler. I will leave it to others to determine how it may relate to the control of roadside advertising as my work does not bring me into the fields of highway planning or research. The State of Nebraska has not yet implemented any program to remove roadside advertising from along the right-of-way. However, our approach to the promotion of tourism in Nebraska, at a time and in a place where there is tremendous usage of the automobile for leisure travel, may very well be applicable to the problem of communicating with motorists without the aid of billboards.

The primary objective of our program is to create an image in the mind of the vacationer as he travels across Nebraska. In order for a person to relate to the environment around him, he must have some conception and understanding of that environment. Second, our program is designed to entice the vacationer and encourage or persuade him to leave the Interstate System to visit our attractions and points of interest, and to utilize the many travel services available to him. Essentially, the program is designed to "share" Nebraska with each visitor.

I believe it would be helpful for you to understand Nebraska's marketing position and our potential for growth in the travel industry because it is this information which has brought about the impulse marketing strategy which we employ.

Since pioneer time, Nebraska has been the Gateway to the West. Where thousands of covered wagons crossed the plains a hundred years ago, millions of travelers now follow the twin ribbons of Interstate 80 across Nebraska.