

TIMELINE: A Summary of Recent Political History of L.A. Billboards

1972 The Florida Department of Transportation obtains an inventory list from billboard companies, which is necessary before activists, neighbors and inspectors can identify and dispute illegal billboards. (Over time, inventories are sought in cities such as Houston, Texas; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and San Francisco, California.)

1980 The city of Houston bans billboards after local newspaper articles dub it the "Ugliest City in America," thanks to its sea of 10,000 billboards.

1980s Los Angeles City Councilman Marvin Braude and his aide Cindy Miskowski try to ban new billboard construction; however, they are unsuccessful. Construction unions complain that the ban would lead to unemployment in their industry. At the same time, with historically high rates of murder and street crime, billboard clutter is barely on other city leaders' radar.

1984 Architect Ted Wu helps the city council pass a law preventing billboards from appearing within 600 feet of each other.

1987 Residents in Jacksonville, Florida, vote to ban new billboards. Twenty years later, the city has 1,000 fewer boards than it had in 1987.

1990s Gerry Silver, a professor of business administration at Long Beach City College, and Ted Wu are ordered by the Los Angeles City Council, via City Attorney James Hahn, and with the support of major billboard firms, to halt their efforts to have height regulations imposed on towering new billboards being placed atop Los Angeles buildings.

1997 Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety general manager Andrew Adelman employs just two inspectors to police billboards across 469 square miles of territory.

1999 In an initial effort, Adelman orders inspectors to survey the legal and illegal billboard inventory on a single stretch of Pico Boulevard. Inspector David Keim later admits that the city is incapable of tracking violations.

2001 Councilman Jack Weiss calls for a yearly billboard inspection fee on billboard owners, which would finance an inventory of the signs. The fee was contested through lawsuits filed by the outdoor media companies.

Outdoor media owners donate billboard space valued at more than \$400,000 to tout "Rocky Delgadillo for City Attorney." Delgadillo's campaign is successful.

2002 In a landslide vote, San Francisco citizens approve Proposition G, which bans all new billboards and requires outdoor media companies to hand over their inventory lists.

The city of Los Angeles establishes a ban on new billboards and supergraphics (large-scale advertising that covers the façades of buildings). Department of Building and Safety officials don't enforce the inspection fee on either legal or illegal billboards.

2005 Vista Outdoor admits they are "unable to locate" permits for 500 smaller billboards in Los Angeles and agrees to take them down. In 2008, building officials openly admit that they have no clue whether they have been removed.

2006 Dennis Hathaway, Ted Wu, and Gerry Silver for the Coalition to Ban Billboard Blight.

Los Angeles City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo and the city council meet privately to work out a settlement with outdoor advertising companies that have sued the city in response to the inspection fee. They agree to the following: certain billboard companies have six years to take down ninety-eight boards of their choice (3% of their inventory); the inspection fee is reduced to \$186 per structure; illegal boards built before 1986 are grandfathered in; and 877 boards are approved for modernization (replacing the existing board with LED displays). The companies are required to turn over an inventory list; they file lawsuits claiming the lists are trade secrets.

2007 A crew of workers for L.A. Outdoor Advertising pours a concrete foundation next to the Harbor Freeway and erects an illegal billboard atop an equally illegal ten-ton superstructure that can be removed only with a wrecker. Work is done in full view of the offices of Los Angeles city billboard inspectors.

2008 Large companies continue to resist releasing their inventory lists.

On April 22, the city council votes to let Clear Channel erect two large billboards along the 10 Freeway, setting a precedent for advertising on the freeway. The city of Los Angeles faces lawsuits from other, smaller billboard companies for the right to build digital billboards in the city. Under pressure from citizens, the city approves a three-month moratorium on new digital billboards. A federal injunction, issued by U.S. District Judge Audrey Collins, stops the city from enforcing the three-

month moratorium and the 2002 ban. The injunction cites preferential treatment in the 2006 settlement towards certain companies. An increase of super-graphics on buildings around the city results. In response, the city adopts a new ban on all new outdoor advertising and, in a related moratorium, outdoor art murals are banned.

2009 No new structures go up, but existing legal and illegal billboards, supergraphics, and digital signs continue to operate. Residents of buildings covered by supergraphics, such as Dr. David Allen of West Los Angeles, begin to protest, and the *Los Angeles Times* writes an editorial asking Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to do something about the supergraphics, since the "witless" city council and city attorney's office have not.

2010 Los Angeles City Attorney Carmen Trutanich seeks fines for illegal signage of up to \$10,000, and files lawsuits alleging that supergraphics were unlawfully installed on 12 buildings throughout the city, in violation of the city ban on new such signage. Billboard companies claim that the move violates the 2008 federal injunction. Four days later, Kayvan Setareh, a businessman from Pacific Palisades, is arrested at his home, accused of posting illegal supergraphics on a building at the intersection of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland Avenue. He is held on \$1,000,000.00 bail, but that is reduced to \$100,000 after he agrees to remove the advertisement within 24 hours of his release. In the weeks that follow, several more supergraphics are removed.

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Top: Intersection of 11th Street and Hill Street.

Are printed billboards a dying breed? Clear Channel's forgotten offspring is a palimpsest of aging outdoor media, with multiple layers of falling and falling imagery.

Bottom: Intersection of La Brea Avenue and San Vicente Boulevard. New LED digital billboards change images every eight seconds to maximize consumer suggestion. Despite the moratorium, LED billboards were grandfathered in last year due to a settlement between the City of Los Angeles and outdoor media corporations. Public debate surrounding these frenetic billboards involves varying expert opinions about whether their brightness and motion constitute traffic hazards.