



TIABC POLICY ON PROVINCE-WIDE MAINTENANCE & REPLACEMENT OF SERVICE & ATTRACTION HIGHWAY SIGNAGE

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Since 1989, following a successful pilot project, new signs were provided on provincial highways and local roads under the Service and Attraction (S&A) Signing Program, for selected types of tourist-oriented services, attraction businesses and other tourist amenities. Signs are erected by the Ministry of Transportation along provincial highways as a relatively uniform method of pointing out conveniences to the traveling public such as gas stations, accommodation, food services, campgrounds, airports, artisans, etc.

NOTE – signs for common service are not erected on conventional urban highways

These signs assist motorists unfamiliar with an area to locate turnoffs leading to tourist facilities and other amenities. They also provide directional and occasional distance information but were not intended to promote any one service, attraction, or facility over another as per current regulations. Confirmatory signs are provided, as required, on freeway exit ramps and at decision points on local roads and municipal streets. Service and attraction signage was introduced to prevent illegal tourism advertising signage being erected and causing a distraction for motorists.



CURRENT PROVINCE OF BC HIGHWAY SIGNS POLICY

The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure operates under the principle that highways are safest for motorists when they are relatively free of distractions. For this reason, private signs along BC highways are not permitted.

Some approved signs are necessary to point out services and attractions at highway exits and for directions.

For facilities less commonly found in urban areas such as marinas, boat ramps, sani-stations and campgrounds, the Ministry provides generic (i.e. symbol) directional signage.

Tourism operators or communities may apply specifically for a service and attraction sign but must meet specified minimum standards and be located within specified maximum distances from provincial highway turnoffs. These distances are calculated based on how far a traveller might reasonably expect to drive to reach those facilities.

If the Ministry approves the application for a service and attraction sign, it will be ordered and installed.



TIABC ANALYSIS OF CURRENT SIGNAGE POLICY

A. Signs throughout the province are not inclusive and do not allow for accurate naming of Indigenous tourism locations.

B. Tourism businesses are reporting poorly maintained blue and white signs in many locations throughout the province. These worn, dirty or damaged signs tarnish the image of communities and the province in general.

C. Tourism businesses and communities report not having access to confirmatory directional signs on rural provincial highways.

D. There appears to be inconsistent application of the signage program with some operators claiming little to no service while others report exceptional service by local maintenance contractors.

E. There are no published guidelines on how often signs are inspected, cleaned, and replaced as necessary.

F. There is also confusion as to who monitors the signage that is erected and how quickly reported business closures or repairs are handled by maintenance crews.

G. There is inconsistency in where signs are placed (i.e. setback from the highway).



TIABC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** The Ministry of Transportation must conduct an annual audit of all existing signs in each region to A) understand relevance of current signage and update as necessary (e.g. delete references to businesses that are closed), and B) to identify wayfinding gaps such as failure to list turn-offs for services or amenities.
- 2.** All blue and white service and attraction signs should be maintained to the standard that befits the province's Super, Natural British Columbia tourism brand.
- 3.** Existing signs should be upgraded, or new signs introduced to include Indigenous communities and tourism businesses in the spirit of reconciliation.
- 4.** To avoid lengthy waits to replace or repair signage, the province should offer an expedited process that allows private operators to pay all or part of the cost if they so choose.
- 5.** As part of the tourism industry's recovery from the effects of the pandemic, the province invests in new signage or repairs existing signs to help BC's brand and to provide marketing opportunities for rural tourism businesses, including business names, that rely on signage to direct visitors to their premises and establishments.
- 6.** The province must introduce and publish guidelines for signage maintenance and renewal that are clear, transparent and easy to access, providing guidance on government budgets for signage replacements, the process for upgrades, timelines for the work, and government contacts in each region.
- 7.** The ministry must make it simpler and more efficient for new businesses to apply for new signage online.
- 8.** The ministry should have an identified contact person within each region for tourism operators to consult with and seek information from vis-a-vis new, worn-out or damaged signs.
- 9.** The province should reconsider its policy that suggests signs (including billboards) are a distraction to motorists given that passenger vehicle amenities such as media screens and mobile phones are a bigger distraction than directional or informational signage. Importantly, according to the province's report entitled BC Road Safety Strategy 2025, highway signage is not listed within the top 8 reasons for distracted driving.



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<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/transportation/funding-engagement-permits/permits/works/signs>

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/transportation/transportation-infrastructure/contracting-to-transportation/highway-bridge-maintenance/highway-maintenance/contacts>