



February 11, 2025

The Honorable Senator D. Scott Dibble, Chair
Senate Transportation Committee
Minnesota Senate Building
Room 1100
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Opposition of SF485 – New Billboard Moratorium

Chair Dibble and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express strong opposition to Senate File 485, which would establish a statewide moratorium on new billboards and classify existing billboards as nonconforming uses. This legislation, while well-intentioned, fails to recognize the vital economic role that billboard advertising plays in Minnesota's tourism and hospitality sectors.

The premise that billboards harm tourism is not supported by economic data. In fact, billboards serve as crucial way-finding tools that directly benefit tourists and the businesses that serve them. Consider these key points:

1. Small hospitality businesses, particularly those in rural Minnesota, rely heavily on billboard advertising to attract travelers who might otherwise pass by. These locally owned restaurants, hotels, and attractions often cannot afford extensive digital marketing campaigns and depend on billboard visibility for their survival.
2. Billboards provide real-time information to travelers about available services, helping them make informed decisions about where to stop for food, lodging, or attractions. This improves the overall tourist experience in Minnesota by making travel more convenient and accessible.
3. The hospitality industry employs over 250,000 Minnesotans and generates significant tax revenue for our state. Many of these businesses report that billboard advertising delivers measurable returns on investment and drives substantial customer traffic.
4. Tourist attractions throughout the state, from the Mall of America to smaller regional destinations, use strategic billboard placement to increase visitor awareness and attendance. This contributes directly to Minnesota's \$16.6 billion tourism economy.

Rather than harming tourism, billboards play an essential role in promoting it. They serve as 24/7 marketing tools that:

- Direct travelers to local businesses and attractions they might otherwise miss
- Provide important wayfinding services in rural areas where digital navigation may be less reliable
- Support small businesses that cannot afford more expensive advertising channels
- Help maintain the economic vitality of smaller communities along our highways



Instead of a complete moratorium, I urge the committee to consider more balanced approaches that could include:

- Updated design standards to ensure aesthetic compatibility
- Incentives for upgrading existing billboards to more modern designs
- Designated scenic corridors where restrictions might be appropriate, while maintaining advertising opportunities in commercial areas

The proposed legislation would harm the very businesses that make Minnesota a vibrant tourist destination. We should focus on supporting these businesses rather than eliminating one of their most effective marketing tools.

Thank you for your consideration of these important economic impacts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Angie Whitcomb". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Angie Whitcomb,
President & CEO
Hospitality Minnesota