2.8. ADIRONDACK TOURIST DESTINATION SIGNAGE PROGRAM

2.8.1. INTRODUCTION

The concept discussed in this section – the Adirondack Tourist Destination Signage Program – is focused on the Tourist travel market, and the travel information needs of a particular travel group – those destined for the mix of recreational, scenic, and athletic destinations within the Adirondack area. The traveler guidance provided by this relatively simple but vitally needed type of program simplifies necessary decisions by travelers – the best route to major destinations, the location of lodging, restaurants, campgrounds, etc. This type of traveler assistance, which will also provide support for the recreation and tourist industries that are vital to this area of the state, is fully consistent with the Smart/Safe Traveler goal of the corridor’s overall Strategic Plan.

2.8.2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Adirondack Tourism Destination Signage Program is a system of signing designed to direct travelers along I-87 within the Adirondacks to motorist services and to guide visitors to tourism and recreational destinations and attractions that are associated with a tourism promotion plan. The purpose of the signing is to complement existing tourism promotional efforts with a simple and unified system of signs that will be simple for travelers to understand and follow. The initial program would involve implementing the signage program along Scenic Route 73 in Essex County (see Figure 2.8-1). Upon completion and assessment of the success of this initial effort, possible expansion of the program to other routes within the Adirondack region, or in other key recreational and scenic areas within the State will be considered.

2.8.2.1. Existing Conditions and Deficiencies

The lack of signing that directs travelers to motorist services is a major concern along I-87 in the Adirondacks. Many travelers are unfamiliar with the area and do not know what businesses and services are available at each interchange, or how far they must drive to access services after leaving the highway. The remote character and sense of wilderness of the Adirondacks is an attribute that attracts many visitors to the Adirondacks. However, this same remoteness, combined with poor weather in the winter, can create confusion, concern, and other difficulty for travelers, particularly those in need of assistance and services.

General motorist service markers\(^1\) and specific service (logo) signs\(^2\) are routinely used at interchanges in rural areas to direct travelers to services. However, NYSDOT and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) have agreed not to install signs along I-87 north of Exit 20 (just north of Glens Falls and south of the “Blue Line” – the border around the Adirondack Park) for aesthetic reasons.

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\(^1\) As limited by the New York State Manual of Unified Traffic Control Devices (NYSMUTCD) in §251.11.

\(^2\) See NYSMUTCD §253.7 and §253.8.
General motorist service signs are located on exit ramps where the services are available within the maximum distance from the interchange as required in the NYSMUTCD. An example of general motorist service signs mounted at the end of a Northway ramp is illustrated in Figure 2.8-2.

At some interchanges in the High Peaks area, motorist services are not located within the required distance. For example, at Exit 29 and Exit 30, fuel stations are not located within the three-mile distance required by the NYSMUTCD to allow the sign to be eligible. Fuel services accessible from I-87 in the Adirondacks can be infrequent, and a drive greater than three miles from the I-87 interchanges is not unreasonable, especially considering the alternative of running out of fuel on I-87 in a remote section of the Adirondacks. As illustrated in Figure 2.8-3, motorists low on fuel often receive no information about the availability of fuel at some interchanges and will instead stop at other businesses and residences to get directions to the closest station.

Specific service logo signs are available for qualifying businesses. However, many business owners are either unaware of the program or refuse to participate, which results in numerous homemade signs being illegally installed at strategic locations.

The economy of the Adirondacks relies heavily on tourism travel, which can be difficult because of the vastness of the Adirondack region. Comments received during the Study's Economic Zone meetings in the Adirondack region revealed the difficulties tourists and recreational travelers have getting between destinations within the region after the visitor has arrived. Some of the difficulty in navigating within the Adirondacks results from confusion over the various geographical areas within the region. For example, Whiteface Mountain is a popular tourism and recreational travel destination. Most people associate Whiteface Mountain with Lake Placid because of its association with the Olympics. However, Whiteface Mountain is actually located in the town of Wilmington, which is not as well known.

There are numerous natural or cultural attractions that are not located on major highways and are difficult to find because of the lack of signing. An example is Split Rock Falls, which is located on Route 9 between the intersection with Route 73 and Elizabethtown. Most visitors travel along Route 73 and tend to overlook this attraction because of the lack of signing.
The Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) has established a series of thematic highways that can assist with wayfinding and navigating to various tourism destinations. Trailblazer signing has been installed along these highways to guide motorists along each thematic route that is promoted with tourism literature.

Most of the main roads in the Adirondacks are state highways, and many of the businesses are located on state highways. However, only businesses that are located off of the state highway system on county or local roads are eligible for New York State’s tourist-oriented destination (TOD) sign program. Businesses located in lesser-known areas are difficult to find, even though they may be major tourism attractions or services. Unfortunately, there are no provisions in the NYSMUTCD for installing signs to direct travelers to these destinations that are located on state highways.

The APA and other advocates of scenic highways are concerned with the proliferation of signs along the Adirondack highways. Many of the highway signs within the right-of-way appear to be redundant or unnecessary, and existing signs are not consistent in size, text or color. Many of the trailblazer signs along theme highways have added to the signing clutter. The lack of consistency results in visual clutter and can cause confusion for drivers.

In summary, existing signing systems do not adequately meet the unique needs of tourism and recreational travel in the Adirondacks. Signing policies and guidelines need to be reviewed and a comprehensive program needs to be developed specifically for the Adirondack region.

2.8.2.2. Existing Actions and Programs

The NYSMUTCD provides standards and guidelines regarding the use of signs along highways in the State of New York. Section 253.7 of the NYSMUTCD describes the application, design, and location of tourist-oriented business signs that are used to guide traffic from numbered route systems to businesses not on the system. They are also used to provide guidance from freeways to motorist service facilities. The signs, which list a specific business name or logo, are mounted on panels that do not exceed four signs. The background color of the signs is blue which denotes a service sign. Under NYSMUTCD Special Authorization 83-3, signs within the Adirondack Park contain yellow legends on brown backgrounds. Businesses must apply for these signs through the regional offices of NYSDOT. Once they are approved, businesses pay an annual fee and are responsible for purchasing, installing and maintaining the signs.

The Route 73 Scenic Corridor Management Plan identified a problem with sign proliferation. The goal of Action 7 (Highway Signing Rehabilitation) of the management plan is to minimize the number of visual intrusions along Route 73 by removing unnecessary and unwarranted signing along the highway except for regulatory signs and signing that is essential for the driving task.

Key recommendations included in the management plan that are relevant to this initiative include:

- Development of a task force similar to the organization that prepared the NYSDOT Guidelines for the Adirondack Park Highway, (June 1994) to review all signing along the highway and develop a set of recommendations specifically for Route 73 that would be appended to the Guidelines.
- Consideration of smaller logo signing similar to tourism-oriented business signing in Vermont instead of the larger signing currently used in New York.
Because of the overabundance of trailblazer signs or trailblazer-like signs that use logos for informational purposes, consideration shall be given to limiting trailblazer signs.

2.8.3. PROPOSED SOLUTION

The proposed solution consists of two individual project initiatives aimed at addressing the identified signing deficiencies in the I-87 corridor and along state and local highways in the Adirondack region.

2.8.3.1. General Service Signs

The first project initiative involves providing general service signs at exits from I-87 and general service markers on exit ramp terminals at the various interchanges located in the Adirondack region where fuel and food are not located within the distances required by the NYSMUTCD. Supplementary signs would be added for each market at the end of the ramp showing the distance to services to the left, right, and ahead on I-87. This additional signing would allow a motorist to decide if it is in his or her best interest to travel off I-87 to a service or continue on I-87 to the next interchange with fuel or food.

These signs would indicate the types of services available, general directions, and approximate distances to the services. The types of services eligible for signs include lodging, gas, phone, food, and tourist information. Both the placement of these signs and the eligibility of the services would be guided by general motorist service markers (NYSMUTCD § 251.11) and general service signs (NYSMUTCD § 253.9) regulations, except that the eligibility for fuel signs would not be limited to three miles.

In order to maintain consistency with other directional signage within the Adirondack Park, all general service signs and markers located within the Adirondack Park would be colored brown with yellow legends and text.

2.8.3.2. Tourist Destination Signs

The second project initiative involves the establishment of a standardized tourist destination signing system specific to the Adirondack region that would complement the existing New York State TOD sign program and existing scenic byway programs.

An Adirondack Signing Task Force would be assembled to guide the establishment of the tourist destination signing system for the Adirondacks. The Task Force would be composed of representatives from NYSDOT, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), APA, counties, towns, business organizations, and tourism organizations in the region.

The objective of the new signing system would be to prevent proliferation of inconsistent signage and promote development of tourist-related business and industry while maintaining safe and efficient travel in the region. Businesses would be eligible for up to four destination signs located within the highway right-of-way in the towns in which they are located. Eligibility of businesses would not be constrained by the need to be located off of the state highway system on county or local roads. Tourism-related businesses and tourism destinations would be eligible for signs at intersections with a higher classification of roadway, a roadway with a significantly higher volume of traffic, or a roadway that is part of a thematic highway.
The proposed system of signing would replace existing TOD signing and information or destination signing. For example, existing NYSDEC signs directing hikers to trailheads as illustrated in Figure 2.8-4 would be replaced with new signs containing a hiking logo and the name of the wilderness area.

Organizations responsible for other tourist-related destination signs would also be eligible for new signs to potentially replace the existing trailblazing signs. For example, a tourist attraction or a natural resource that is promoted as part of a thematic highway may be signed with the logo that is associated with the thematic highway, such as the interpretation of the War of 1812 along the Seaway Trail. Various travel loops are signed to guide travelers off of the Seaway Trail to points of interest related to the War of 1812. Under the proposed project, these thematic signs would ultimately be replaced with signage consistent with other tourism destination signs throughout the region.

All signs erected under the new system would be colored brown with yellow legends and text to maintain consistency with Adirondack Park signage. The size of the signs, which would be smaller than the traditional TOD signs, would be uniform throughout the system. The signs would contain the official name of the business or tourist attraction, concise directional information, and a distinctive logo or generic symbol for the type of business/attraction being represented. The overall size and content of the signs would be modeled after the official business directional signs (OBDS) used by the State of Vermont as illustrated in Figure 2.8-5.
2.8.3.3. Bilingual Signage

Another unique aspect of the Adirondack region is its close proximity to the Canadian province of Quebec and the subsequent large number of French-speaking visitors to the area. To further facilitate tourism and recreational travel in the region, the proposed signage program would therefore present all information in both English and French, as well as providing directional information in kilometers as well as miles.

2.8.4. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The first phase of the standardized tourist destination signing system is proposed for Route 73. Many of the recommendations for this initiative were initially proposed as part of the Route 73 Scenic Corridor Management Plan. Route 73 has many of the signing problems and deficiencies that are typical throughout the Adirondack Park. Subsequent phases of the proposed system would be implemented pending the outcome of the Route 73 demonstration project. The implementation of the first initiative, the installation of general business signing at I-87 interchanges, would begin immediately upon acceptance and funding of the program.

The implementation of the general service signing initiative would involve a comprehensive inventory of existing services in the vicinity of the interchanges in the region. Eligible services would be identified based on this inventory and new signs would be erected where appropriate. NYSDOT would be responsible for the administration of the proposed signing initiative including the costs associated with the installation and maintenance of the signs. With the installation of the general service markers, installation of tourist oriented business signs would not be allowed on I-87 ramps. The installation of tourist oriented business signs along intersection roadways after the turn off of the I-87 ramp should be at the discretion of the Highway Signing Task Force.

The implementation of the standardized tourist destination signing system initiative would begin with the establishment of a regional committee by NYSDOT and the adoption of formal rules and procedures to govern the new system. The committee, which would be overseen by NYSDOT, would initially be responsible for conducting a comprehensive inventory of existing non-regulatory signs in the region and recommending the maintenance or removal of these signs based on the existing and revised governing sign guidelines.

Eligible businesses and organizations would be required to submit applications for signs to be erected under the new system. The application would be reviewed by a regional committee for conformance with existing APA sign laws, NYSMUTCD standards, and any revisions to these policies adopted specifically for this system. A nominal application fee and annual renewal fee would be collected for each application and erected sign to help sponsor the administration of the tourist destination signing system.

The regional committee would be comprised of representatives from the tourist organizations responsible for the various themed highways and representatives from the various towns within the region. NYSDOT would establish the regional committee specifically for the administration of the new signing system. Precedent for this type of system exists under Vermont's OBDS program. Under the Vermont program, the Agency of Transportation administers the OBDS program through a governor-appointed Travel Information Council (TIC). District committees appointed by the TIC are responsible for the review and approval of sign applications within their districts.
2.8.4.1. Regulatory, Environmental, and Agency Coordination Issues

The Adirondack Park Sign Law, ECL Article 9, Title 3, 6NYCRR Part 195, regulates the design and location of signs within the Adirondack Park. The law promulgates a permit process administered by NYSDEC for signs. The signing system would have to be reviewed and approved by NYSDEC.

NYSDOT Guidelines for the Adirondack Park is an interagency guide to the design, construction and maintenance of highways in the Adirondack Park. The recommendations of the comprehensive signing system should be incorporated or become an appendix to the NYSDOT Guidelines.

The implementation of the standardized tourist destination signing system along Route 73 would occur after the Task Force has been assembled and deliberated.

2.8.4.2. Project Costs

The following are the projected costs for the proposed improvement initiatives:

| Adirondack Tourist Destination Signage Program:                      |
| Project Implementation Cost                                      |
| Element                          | Cost          |
| Engineering/Design [1]          | $50,000       |
| Equipment/Materials             | $50,000       |
| Construction/Installation       | $50,000       |
| Operating & Maintenance         | N/A           |
| TOTAL                            | $150,000      |

[1] Includes program planning, agency coordination, etc.

As indicated, the projected capital costs for the proposed project would be approximately $150,000. The Task Force, as well as the effort to develop a comprehensive signing program for the Adirondacks, may be eligible for Scenic Byway Funding.