

# **Regional Tourism Signage Study**

**for Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne,  
Wyoming, and Yates Counties**



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## **I Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to study the potential for a standardized regional tourism signage system. This report is primarily policy-oriented and includes only selected traffic engineering standards. The report addresses the following elements:

- existing and proposed local, county, regional, and state tourism signage systems
- the rules and guidelines that govern existing systems or will govern proposed systems in terms of sign design and location
- the costs of sign installation and maintenance
- preliminary sign location recommendations
- the potential for the adoption of international signs and symbols
- a preliminary strategy for implementing a standardized regional tourism signage system
- a list of tourism and tourism-related agencies and organizations in our region

## **II Methodology**

For the preparation of this report the author consulted federal and New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) manuals and interviewed local, county, regional, and state officials.

In the section on NYS DOT State highways, the numbers in parentheses refer to the respective chapters in the federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and the NYS Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

The reproduced signs and markers are selected examples of their respective sign categories to visually enhance this report. The author created the classification system of tourist services signs, tourist destination signs, and billboards for better understanding. Included price ranges for signs and markers are estimates.

The recommendations are based on the review of federal and state manuals and interviews with local, county, regional, and state officials.

### III Signage Systems

#### 1) NYS DOT State highways

Signs erected in the right-of-way of state highways have to comply with federal and state highway laws. Federal law governs the highway sign program throughout the country. Because of this, states have to follow the federal provisions outlined in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. New York State adopted its own law and regulations that are as stringent - and in some aspects more stringent - than the federal law and regulations. However, NYS is in the process of updating its own manual in response to the update of the federal manual (2000). For this reason, some of the new federal standards have not been included in the state manual yet.

In regards to tourism and tourism-related highway signs, the federal and state manuals define four main groups of signs and billboards:

##### 1.1. Tourist services signs (white-on-blue)

- **General motorist service markers (251.11)**

These white-on-blue signs provide necessary guidance for motorists exiting from a freeway to obtain **gas, food, lodging, camping services, or tourist information**. Markers are used to guide to services in the immediate vicinity of the freeway.



Eligibility criteria apply to all services. Tourist information facilities should be open at least eight hours per day, seven days per week, and should have public telephone services available at all times.

- **Motorist service supplementary markers (251.13)**

These white-on-blue signs are used to inform traffic of a freeway rest area with **rest room facilities** or that the area has a **scenic view**. Another sign indicates that the facilities **can be used by physically handicapped travelers**.

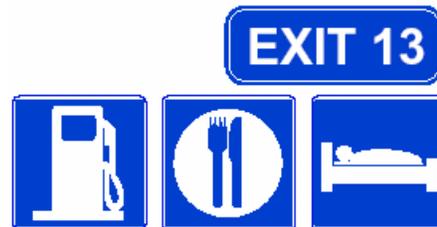
These markers should be used in conjunction with regular *parking and rest area signs* (253.6).



- **General Services sign** (253.9)

This white-on-blue sign informs motorists on a rural freeway approaching an interchange that **fuel, food, lodging, and/or camping services** - without providing brand or facility names - are conveniently accessible from the interchange exit.

These signs should not be used in urbanized areas (population of 5000 or more) where the availability of motorist services is evident or may reasonably be assumed. Eligibility criteria apply and number of signs is limited.



- **Specific services signs** (253.8)

This white-on-blue sign informs motorists on a rural freeway approaching an interchange that **fuel, food, lodging, and/or camping services** - by providing brand or facility names - are conveniently accessible from the interchange exit.

The following eligibility criteria apply: easy access, seven day per week operation, permanent public telephone service. In addition, maximum distance from the freeway exit ramp is three miles for fuel services, six miles for food services, nine miles for lodging and twelve miles for camping facilities. There is a maximum allowed number of erected signs, other limitations also apply.



Specific services signs may be used only where necessary tourist oriented business signs (253.7) are in place on the freeway exit ramp and at subsequent locations to direct traffic to the service facilities. Specific service signs should not be used in urbanized areas (population of 5000 or more) where the availability of motorist services is evident or may reasonably be assumed.

A regular 24" x 15" sign costs ca. \$200; the annual permit fee amounts to \$100.

- **Tourist oriented business signs (253.7)**

The white-on-blue signs, used in conjunction with specific services signs, direct travelers from the freeway exit ramp to nearby service facilities. Tourist oriented business signs (TOD) also guide traffic from the numbered route system to tourist-oriented businesses and sites located on non-primary routes.

The type of tourist services and tourist destinations include **fuel services, restaurants, hotels, motels, camping services, trailer parks, resorts, antique shops, gift shops, art galleries, golf courses, marinas, natural phenomena, historic, cultural, scientific, educational, and religious sites.**



For example, a tourist oriented business signs could be used to direct travelers from the freeway exit ramp to a nearby fast food restaurant or guide motorists on conventional highways to an arts and crafts shop located on an unnumbered road.

These signs should not be used in urbanized areas (population of 5000 or more) where the availability of motorist services is evident or may reasonably be assumed. Eligibility criteria apply and number of signs is limited.

A regular 24" x 15" sign costs ca. \$200; the annual permit fee amounts to \$50.

1.2. Tourist destination signs (white-on-green or white-on-brown)

• **Destination markers (251.9)**

The white-on-green destination markers are used along conventional highways to guide traffic to certain types of destinations, such as **train stations, colleges, ski centers, vineyards, boat launch ramps, ferry terminals, intercity bus stations, commercial airports, park & ride lots, parks, state parks, light-rail stations, theaters, post offices, hiking trails, libraries, commercial orchards, ski centers, ice-skating rinks, scenic vistas, commercial ports, light houses, fishing spots, and fish hatcheries.**

Destination markers are used to direct motorists from the exit of a numbered route or major highway to the immediate vicinity of the destination. For this reason, these markers should not be used unless there exist subsequent signs to reach the destination.



Destination markers can be supplemented by name auxiliary signs that identify the name of the facility (251.15)

• **Historic site markers (251.10)**

These white-on-brown markers are used along conventional highways to guide traffic to **places of recognized historic value** operated and maintained in the public interest. Historic sites have to be listed in The National Register of Historic Places or endorsed by the New York State Education Department.



Historic site markers, displaying the name of the site, are used to direct motorists from the exit of a numbered route or major highway to the immediate vicinity of the destination. For this reason, these markers should not be used unless there exist subsequent signs to reach the destination. They should not be used on main freeways.

- **Region sign (252.13)**

These white-on-green signs are used to inform motorists that several exits provide **access to a community or region**. The sign should be used where two or more exits exist.



- **Bicycle route markers (251.7)**

These mostly white-on-green markers guide bicycle traffic along an unnumbered or numbered bicycle route that is part of a bicycle route system or connects two places between which bicycle travel is common.



- **Snowmobile route markers (251.8)**

This white-on-green sign is used on highways where snowmobiles are permitted to use the roadway, shoulder, or inside bank.

- **Official / public service signs (150)**

Signs that advertised an activity by a municipality, state agency, federal agency, or not-for-profit organization recognized by DOT as a legitimate applicant. These signs may have additional requirements depending upon the specific circumstances.

For example, municipalities may put up Welcome signs to greet visitors or erect panels that list local churches or social clubs.



### 1.3. Billboards

- **Off premise (registered) signs (150)**

Mostly billboard type signs along major highways, controlled-access, and non-controlled-access primary highways that are placed outside the highway right-of-way. Off-premise signs are allowed only in areas zoned for commercial and/or industrial uses, or in unzoned areas that contain commercial and/or industrial activities.

Sign size limits and spacing requirements between signs and highway facilities apply.

There is a sign inspection fee of \$50 after the sign is erected or modified. The annual permit cost per sign face is based on the following sliding scale:

- less than 101 square feet - \$20
- less than 601 square feet - \$50
- more than 601 square feet - \$100

- **On premise signs (150)**

Signs that are on the property of the activity that they advertise. Signs that advertise the sale or lease of the property that they are on are also included in this category.

### 1.4. Recreational and cultural interest area signs (Federal MUTCD, Ch. 2H)

New York State adopted its own highway law and regulations that are as stringent - and in some aspects more stringent - than the federal law and regulations. However, NYS is in the process of updating its own manual in response to the update of the federal manual (2000). Because of this, recreational and cultural interest area signs are not part of the NYS regulations yet, but must be adopted by 2003.

Recreational and cultural interest area signs are attractions or traffic generators that are open to the general public for the purpose of play, relaxation, and amusement. Recreational attractions include such attractions as parks, campgrounds, and ski areas; while examples of cultural attractions include museums, galleries, and historic buildings.

The brown-on-white signs guide motorists to a general area of recreational and cultural interest and then to specific destinations within the area. The signs can also be used for non-vehicular amenities such as hiking and biking trails.

The following signs can be used in conjunction with auxiliary directional signs (arrows):

- **General directional guide signs**

The white-on-brown signs show the direction of recreational and cultural destinations.

- **Recreation and cultural interest area signs**

The white-on-brown signs show the location of recreational and cultural destinations.



## 2) **Scenic Byway highways**

The NYS legislature created the scenic byway program and designated certain portions of the state highway system because of their scenic, historic, recreational, cultural and archeological value (NYS Highway Law, Article XII-C, Section 349). Examples for scenic byways in our region are the Seaway Trail and the proposed Cayuga Lake Wine Trail.

Because scenic byways are state highways DOT signage guidelines apply. However, the scenic byway program allows for additional tourism-related directional signs and information panels along the highway.

- **Trailblazing sign**

This white-on-green sign guides tourists along the route of the trail.



- **Theme sign**

Along the Seaway Trail, this white-on-brown sign displays the War of 1812 as the trail theme and leads motorists to 42 historic sites - each interpreted with a unique War of 1812 message.

- **Visitor information sign**

The white-on-green sign shows a question mark and informs the traveling public about the location of display panels and kiosks.

- **Display panels and Kiosk**

The color-on-gray panels and kiosks inform the public about local and regional historic sites and cultural and recreational facilities and events. Examples include public boat launch sites, information on local fishing and boating, agricultural products, local festivals, and key attractions in the county.

- **Interpretive panels**

These four-color panels feature information on historic and natural history sites along the Seaway Trail. For example, panels explain the historic significance of the lighthouses in Charlotte (Monroe Co.) and Sodus (Wayne Co.).

### **3) Heritage Areas**

Established by the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic preservation, the Heritage Area System (formerly known as the Urban Cultural Park System) is a state-local partnership established to preserve and develop these areas that have special significance to New York State.

In our region designated Heritage Areas are the High Falls neighborhood in Rochester and the Western Erie Canal Heritage Corridor.

The NYS Office of Parks in collaboration with the NYS DOT developed the following white-on-brown signs for the Heritage Areas:

- **Heritage Area**



- **Riverspark**

- **Visitor Center**

#### **4) *Wine Trails***

The New York State legislature designated portions of several state highways as wine trails (NYS Highway Law, Article XII, Section 343-k). Examples for wine trails in our region are the Canandaigua Trail, the Keuka Trail, the Seneca Trail West, and the Cayuga Trail.



- **Logo**

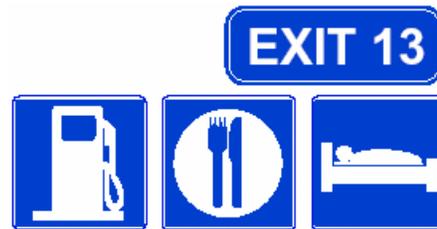
Each trail uses a logo in combination with the DOT destination marker for vineyards to guide visitors to wineries along the respective trail.

#### **5) *NYS Thruway Authority***

## Highways

- **General Services sign**

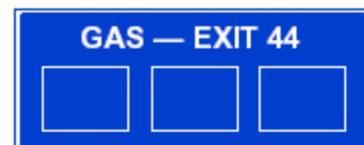
Similar to the DOT sign, this white-on-blue sign inform motorists on the NYS Thruway approaching an interchange that **fuel and/or food services** - without providing brand or facility names - are conveniently accessible from the interchange exit.



Eligibility criteria are, among others, that fuel and food services be located within two miles from the highway exit ramp and operate 16 hours a day for seven days per week. DOT approved tourist oriented business signs (253.7) or billboards (150) must guide motorists from exit ramp to the business.

- **Specific services signs**

Similar to the DOT sign, this white-on-blue sign informs motorists on the NYS Thruway approaching an interchange that **lodging, and/or camping services, and attractions** - by providing brand or facility names - are conveniently accessible from the interchange exit.



The following eligibility criteria apply: easy access, seven day per week operation (lodging and camping), permanent public telephone service. In addition, maximum distance from the freeway exit ramp is nine miles for lodging, twelve miles for camping facilities, and fifteen miles for attractions. Attractions must operate at least four days per week during annual or seasonal operation, but not less than 30 days, and must demonstrate annual average daily attendance figures of 100. Other requirements and limitations also apply.

The following sites may qualify as attractions:

**NATIONAL or STATE: battlefield, government center, historic site, nature preserve, park, urban cultural park and**

**OTHER: amusement park, aquarium, arena / stadium, beach, convention center, cultural center, factory outlet center, golf course, historical society, historic house / museum, museum / art gallery, industrial facility, performing arts center, race track / speedway, scenic railroad, zoo, scenic / natural attraction (cave, forest, garden, nature preserve, waterfall, etc.), ski area / scenic lift / fun slide, theme park, tour boat, winery / brewery.**

Specific services signs may be used only where DOT approved tourist oriented business signs (253.7) or billboards (150) are in place on the freeway exit ramp and at subsequent locations to direct traffic to the service facilities.

The basic annual permit cost is \$750 per interchange. The fabrication cost of each sign is \$250. There is an additional charge of \$400 for covering, changing, or replacing a sign.

- **Region sign**

Similar to the DOT sign, these white-on-green signs are used to inform motorists that several exits provide **access to a community or region**. The sign should be used where two or more exits exist.



For example, the "Finger Lakes Region - Wine Region" signs help to attract motorists to our region.

## **Canals**

As a subsidiary of the NYS Thruway Authority, the NYS Canal Corporation owns large portions of the NYS Canal System; in our region, for example, the Erie (Barge) Canal. To help to transform the Canal into an international recreation and tourist destination, the Canal Corporation developed signage guidelines for use on canal waterfront and trail projects and in canal communities. All signs are orange-on-dark blue. The following signs, panels, and kiosks exist to inform the public of (examples):

- **Historic marker:** historic events



- **Site identifier:** a specific lock
- **Building identifier:** canal park
- **Regulatory sign:** no docking after dark
- **Auto wayfinding signs:** directions to specific villages or sites
- **Trail marker:** canal trail
- **Interpretive wayside kiosk:** background information on sites and events
- **Horizontal / Vertical wayside exhibit:** background information on sites and events
- **Horizontal / Vertical wayside grid:** background information on sites and events
- **Dockside orientation:** background information on sites and events

## 6) ***Federal Agencies Areas***

Several federal agencies manage cultural and natural areas of national significance in our region. All those agencies use white-on-brown signs and markers to guide visitors to their final destinations.

The National Parks Service runs the **Women's Rights National Historical Park** in the Village of Seneca Falls, Seneca County.

The US Department of Agriculture Forest Service supervises the **Finger Lakes National Forest** in Seneca and Schuyler Counties.



The US Federal Fish and Wildlife Service manages the **Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge** in Seneca County.

### **7) County and local highways**

County and local transportation and highway departments usually follow NYS DOT guidelines. However, county and local provisions might differ regarding such regulations as number and minimum setback of private business signs.

Counties may also allow municipalities to use local markers on county roads to guide the public to such destinations as historic districts or farmers' markets.

### **City of Rochester**

There are several different signage systems that exist parallel to each other. However, the City is in the process of developing a new wayfinding program for its larger downtown area that eventually will replace the existing systems [see G) Proposed Signage Systems].

The City Directions Program identifies five destinations (War Memorial, Convention Center, Shopping, Eastman Theatre, and Strong Museum) and uses five colors (green, red, gold, blue, and brown) to mark the respective destinations.



Other signs guide motorists to such attractions as the Susan B. Anthony House, High Falls, the Museum Trail, the Memorial Art Gallery, Frontier Field, and the Public Market. The green/white, brown/white, and cream/red colored signs are separate signage systems that do not belong to a uniform system.

Green metal Getting Around Downtown kiosks are erected at various locations through downtown Rochester.

## **8) Other signage systems**

### ***Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Days Saints sites in Wayne Co.***

The Church erected signs around Palmyra to guide motorists to sites related to the history of the Church, such as the Smith Family House.

### ***Trails***

A variety of local and regional trails use their own logos. Examples are the Genesee Valley Greenway and Ontario Pathways.



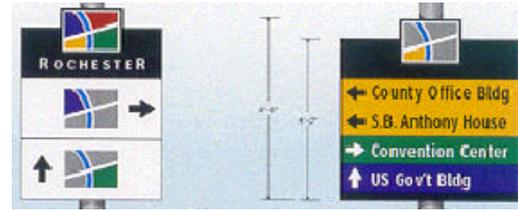
## **9) Proposed signage systems**

### ***City of Rochester***

The City of Rochester is in the process of developing a new wayfinding program for its larger downtown area. The main objective is to provide visitors and residents with information to easily access local attractions, parks, historic buildings, and meeting venues.

The wayfinding program proposal divides the larger downtown area into four quadrants and identifies individual destinations in each of the four quadrants. In general, the following types of destinations will be included in the program: cultural/ institutional sites (e.g. arenas, colleges, museums, libraries, theaters), historic sites and districts, recreational sites (e.g. trails, parks), transportation-related sites (e.g. train stations, marinas), and tourist-related facilities (information centers).

The wayfinding program is currently in the design phase. The final phase of the approval process will begin in early 2002.



## **Ontario County**

In collaboration with NYS DOT, Ontario County is in the review phase of developing a comprehensive signage program. The main objective of the proposed program is to better guide tourists to attractions in the County and thereby boosting tourism-related revenues.

The proposed program lists such tourist-related attractions as antique shops, art galleries, bed and breakfasts, campgrounds, farm markets, marinas, theaters, museums. Only businesses and organizations that meet eligibility standards approved by the County Legislature can participate in the program.

## **IV Recommendations**

### **1) Objectives**

The main objective of a standardized regional tourism signage system is to provide visitors to our region easy and understandable access to tourism-related destinations. A uniform region-wide system of tourism signs, instead of a multitude of local systems in addition to the dominant NYS DOT signage system, would make navigation for visitors easier.

As shown above, there are several different signage systems in our region that are intended to guide tourists through our region. But because of the uncoordinated nature of the existing tourism signage systems, visitors might be easily confused about what the potential destinations are and how to reach them.

There is a direct correlation between the effectiveness of a signage system and the satisfaction of individual tourists and groups traveling throughout the region. Only an effective signage system will guarantee that more visitors can enjoy the natural and cultural resources that our region offers. In return, an increase in visitors will also boost regional tourism-related revenues.

To ensure the effectiveness of a regional signage system, the counties in our region should define areas of recreational and cultural interest to be included in the signage system. This will help to guide tourists from major highways into ar-

eas of interests to final destinations and avoid a confusing and wasteful trailblazing system.

## **2) Principles**

The following principles should underlie a regional tourism signage system:

- safety: signs may not pose a safety hazard and an impediment to smooth traffic flow
- standardization: of sign size, location, color, and content in compliance with federal and state highway regulations
- trail-blazing: throughout the entire regional road network (including local, county and state roads) from the freeway exit into the area of recreational and cultural interest and to the individual attraction or business
- accessibility: the signage system should guarantee equal access for any attraction or business that meets predetermined eligibility criteria
- maintenance: each attraction or business is responsible for the maintenance of signs and surrounding vegetation
- self-finance: each attraction or business assumes the cost for sign erection and maintenance

## **3) Destinations**

The regional tourism signage system includes both public and privately owned/ for-profit destinations:

- cultural/ institutional (museums, libraries, art galleries, theaters, colleges, government buildings, public markets, civic and convention centers, botanical gardens, zoos, etc.)
- historic (historic sites and districts, landmarks, etc.)
- recreational (trails, parks, stadiums, skiing areas, golf course, public beaches, rafting, windsurfing, marinas, bicycle rental, boat cruises, riding centers, theme park, etc.)
- transportation-related (transportation centers, railroad and bus stations, etc.)

- tourism-related (visitors and interpretation centers, hotels, campgrounds, bed and breakfasts, arts and crafts shops, etc.)
- agriculture-related (orchards, vineyards, farm markets, fish hatcheries, etc.)

#### **4) Design**

There exist a variety of different systems of tourism-related signs. As explained above, in addition to the NYS DOT with its destination and service signs, other state, regional, and local sign systems also help to guide motorists to find tourism-related destinations.

The design for a regional tourism signage system should follow the federal provisions in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The NYS DOT has to comply with federal standards outlined in the new 2000 MUTCD. Because of the recent update of the federal manual, the NYS manual is in the process of being updated. The deadline for adoption of the new NYS manual is 2003.

Chapter 2H of the federal MUTCD introduces the category of "Recreational and Cultural Interest Area Signs." A new regional tourism signage system should use the destinations included in this category to the fullest extent. The category covers most destinations listed under 3), uses white-on-brown signs, and allows for directional auxiliary signs (arrows). The signs are similar to those used for the NYS DOT Historic Site, the NYS Heritage Area, and the NYS Scenic Byway programs, as well as to those used for the National Historical Park, the National Forest, and the National Wildlife Refuge programs.

In conjunction with the white-on-brown recreational and cultural interest area signs, existing white-on-blue tourist oriented business signs (TOD) could be used as part of the trail-blazing system to guide motorists from highways in the immediate vicinity of the tourism-oriented business to the final destination. Existing white-on-green destination signs could also be included in the system to direct visitors and residents to such transportation-related destinations as bus and railroad stations and airports.

As it is important to create an effective regional tourism signage system, it is equally important to retain those signs that are recognized by the public at large, such as directional signs for libraries, hospitals, or airports or such service signs as tourist-oriented business signs.

International symbols are usually not explicitly tourism-oriented, but rather of a more general nature. To a large extent, international signs for hotels, airports, or rest rooms are similar to those used in NYS or other states. Also, the available types of international signs might not be sufficient for creating a comprehensive

regional tourism signage system that includes destinations ranging from art galleries to apple orchards. International signs may also not be suitable for conveying a regional identity.

### **5) *Implementation***

- define areas of recreational and cultural interest in the region/ each county
  - regional county tourism agencies cooperate with relevant tourism groups, business organizations, and NYS DOT
- hire consulting firm that is familiar with legal framework and traffic standards
  - contracted firm needs to know federal and state regulations concerning eligibility criteria for tourism-related destinations, attractions, and businesses and state engineering standards regarding sign design and location
- apply to NYS DOT
- hire highway sign company
- implement standardized regional tourism signage system

## Appendix

### ***Regional tourism and tourism-related agencies and organizations***

- County tourism departments/ agencies (Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates Counties)
- New York State Department of Transportation
- New York State Thruway Authority
- New York State Canal Corporation
- New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
- New York State Department of Economic Development
- Finger Lakes Association
- County Chambers of Commerce (Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates Counties)
- New York Wine & Grape Foundation
- Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway
- Seaway Trail Inc.