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# Billboards: Are They Here to Stay? A Study of Billboards in EDSA, Philippines

**Bernadette M. De los Reyes<sup>1</sup>**  
nanetdelos@yahoo.com

Co-authored by:  
**Romeo B. Santos**

## Abstract

*The landscape of Manila has cursorily changed in recent years and the streetscape is a visible text of these changes. One factor is the growing number of advertisements along major thoroughfares which have raised concerns of proliferation and the danger that comes with them. These outdoor advertisements or commonly called billboards are becoming an inherent part of our urban living and have evolved into a big industry that is difficult to disband. This initial stage of an on-going study looks at the aspect of this type of roadside visual pollution, its existing condition and situation in EDSA, Metro Manila. It will attempt to classify billboards and clarify the structure of the process and organization behind the business. Identification of deficiencies, problems, and possibilities in the existing laws, guidelines, and policies that govern its installation is also hoped to be done. The final stage of a future paper intends to formulate and advance a methodology of determining appropriateness of billboards.*

Keywords: billboards or outdoor advertising, urban landscape, streetscape, visual pollution, urban threat

## I. Background

'Advertisers do not dictate the public; the public dictate the advertisers'

The above statement can be a publicly accepted dictum worldwide, but in many countries today however, advertisers appear to have claimed unwarranted rights to open spaces by placing their billboards along major urban thoroughfares and national highways, causing serious urban problems. In a span of less than a decade, the major streets and thoroughfares of Metro Manila have been converted as an advertising space no one can seem to stop. Without proper regulations, the 'omnipresent' pieces of billboards that are now proliferating are bound to cover the skyline and even worst, maybe the road itself! There are clamors to pull down these structures years back but even the strongest typhoon or death of a bystander cannot stop them from

coming up. They are affecting us daily to some extent, and probably, the ills that arise from the phenomenon that is billboard could very well be part of the bigger problems facing urbanized cities of today.

In Metro Manila alone there are a staggering 8,000 billboards in the year 2004 according to the Outdoor Advertising Association of the Philippines (OAAP). The number is still rising fast up to this moment. If it implies a growing economy, then fine - it bodes well for the country.

However, the situation is not that rosy after all. Because of strong typhoons that hit the Philippines frequently and that have toppled down 24 billboards just recently, a noisy wave of actions against billboards has sparked anew. Many people strongly complain that billboards pose both 'mental and physical hazards' which put the public in a real and critical danger. They claim that the risks to motorists and pedestrians are an everyday concern and therefore the indiscriminate installation of billboards must be curbed!

Visual pollution caused by the uncontrolled proliferation of these billboards is another issue at stake. Part of the urban landscape is the streetscape. The buildings shape the urban landscape and the image they give contribute to the public character of the street. These and other elements all come together to form part of the streetscape. The billboards are then to be considered its essential part because of their inescapable presence at the roadsides. They do influence the visual character of streets in either ways, negatively, -by polluting the visual quality of the streetscape on one hand, or positively, - by perhaps enriching its aesthetic variety on the other hand.

But if the billboards will remain to be a regular element of the street, how could they be analyzed so as to strike a balance between the positive and negative influences they have on our urban environment? How can billboards be understood and clarified such that appropriate laws & guidelines are enacted to regulate their existence? How can the appropriateness of billboards be measured; dealing with its design, location, and installation aspects, among other things?

With this background questions as guide, the paper reports on the initial stage of an on-going study about billboards. It discusses the present situation of outdoor advertising or billboards particularly in EDSA, Philippines.

## II. Objectives and Methods of Inventory

The study will attempt to classify the billboards and clarify the structure, the process, and organization behind the business of billboard advertising. A survey & study of

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<sup>1</sup> Bernadette M. De los Reyes is a graduate of the Master of Architecture Program at the University of the Philippines College of Architecture. She is currently teaching at the College of Architecture at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila.

existing laws, guidelines, and policies that govern the installation of billboards in the urban streets and highways will be made. From it, identification of the deficiencies, problems, and possibilities provided by the enabling laws and guidelines will be done. The body of information obtained in the initial stage of the study will be used to attain the main objective and last part of the study which is to formulate and advance a methodology of determining appropriateness of billboards, covering its design, location, and installation, among other things.

The stretch of Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue (EDSA) was studied, focusing on the Guadalupe area for detailed analysis. This portion has the busiest traffic and with the concentration of most number of billboards as assessed by the advertisers themselves. The primary data was gathered and built up through aerial photographs, on-site visual mapping, surveys, interviews, observations and photo/video documentation. Supporting information was collected from archival documents such as printed materials, the web, and pertinent data was taken from government agencies such as the Department of Public Works & Highways (DPWH), Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), and the Makati Engineering Office. Interviews with advertising people and suppliers were also done to ensure up-to-date information regarding the industry. The photo shots and detailed inventory of billboards were done from December 2005 to June 2006.

The mapping of the site was prepared in Autocad with the use of aerial photographs and road maps. In the latter part of the study, a GIS system will be used to incorporate the details of all billboards for ease of access to information and thorough analysis.

### III. The Billboards at EDSA; The 'Force' Behind the 'Frames'

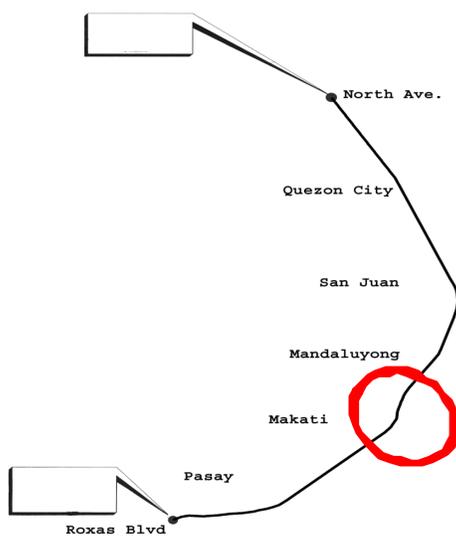


Figure 1: Site Map of Whole Street Area (EDSA)

### The Site and the Current Billboard Situation

The total length of EDSA is 22.9 kms but the project area considered is 17.9 kms stretching from the North Avenue intersection to the southern tip in Pasay City passing thru five districts and cities of Metro Manila. The area along Guadalupe from the Pasig River to Estrella Street is the focus of the study which is 1,183 meters or 1.2 kms, as shown on **Figure 1**.

The map in **Figure 2** and the section profile in **Fig. 3** show in close detail the current situation in the selected site, indicating the instances of billboard installation currently in place. **Figure 4** compares the northbound and southbound nature of billboard advertising in terms of density, character, and volume, among others.

The 'dynamics' of billboards installation is better reflected in the noticeable disparity between the northbound-right (NB-R) and the northbound-left (NB-L) sides of EDSA at this particular spot. The northbound-right is characterized by greater volume of existing billboards, with almost 100% of the volume to the left.

**Figure 5** shows the section profile with the distribution of billboards in the study area. This plots the existing billboard distribution according to the gradient or contour of the road. As shown, there are few spots where there is thicker concentration of installation but there is higher density on the top level and the grade level. Less is found at the sloping area.

Advertisers have established that slow moving traffic is one of the major factors they consider in placing the billboard ads, noting that foreground details become clearer as one slows down (Hornbeck, 1971). Having this concept in mind, another factor that can identify the best spot from the driver or the commuter's point of view is the length of time the ads can be seen in a particular spot or area. The longer the visual contact to an advertisement a commuter is given (as allowed by the instance of his positioning along the road), the higher it will enable him to have the best billboard viewing, and therefore identify the best billboard spot or location.

Following this line of thinking, a geometrical simulation was done to locate and categorize that area or spot, and consequently find out the best possible location derived from the nature of curvature and direction of the road. Using the cone of vision template advanced by Hornbeck (1971), a derivation of the categorized area is shown in **Figure 6**. This tries to determine and clarify the obvious indication of best spot under a particular commuter situation. In the figure, the identified primary spot receives the most legible view or exposure as the commuter navigates the curve coming from a straight path. The secondary spot gets the lesser. Therefore, the findings in **Figure 4** showing the existence of greater volume of billboards at the right side of northbound direction is to some extent explained by this 'principle'.

At a glance, most billboards at the site can be simply described as off-premise self-supporting steel structure on

tarpaulin with varying sizes and forms placed in different angles according to street orientation. This category has only two variations of either front lit or back lit. But billboards come in chaotic varieties and seem difficult to classify. Nevertheless, **Figure 10** somehow presents an attempt to classify the billboards (off-premise) with the objective of further understanding them.

### The Ins and Outs of the Industry; Problems & Issues

There is a quandary as to how an advertisement material finds its way onto a spot along the roadside. There seems to be no standard procedure and one could be lead to being entangled with the complexity of the existing process. It is one reason perhaps that explains the emergence of ad agencies that are in business of 'managing' the work of advertising for clients, usually catering services to big companies- to relieve these firms of the headaches of going through a ticklish process of putting their billboards up themselves.

**Figure 7** tries to clarify the process by tracing the route of advertising transaction. It traces the flow of engagement starting from the client hiring an ad agency who works as a middleman, down to the task of finding the right supplier who will be the installer of a specific advertisement project. The easiest arrangement is for the supplier to finish up the bulk of the work including obtaining the permits, installation, and up to the operation and maintenance of the whole project based on contract terms. Otherwise, the client can directly work with each specific outfit, e.g., with designers, engineers, or the site owners, but this is hardly done because of the difficulty as indicated early on.

**Figure 8** shows the supposed structure of the organization behind the billboard industry. From early 1980s, when the outdoor advertising gained much momentum, organizations sprung up to benefit from and give credence to ad companies that were on the forefront. But after a decade or two, more companies opened up and many of these were not anymore connected with any of the official ad organizations.

This situation resulted to problems, such as a loosely regulated billboard industry, and illegal billboard installations, among others. In particular, it made difficult the tracking down of the owners of illegally built billboard structures. The ADBOARD (Advertising Board of the Philippines) and even the OAAP, the official organization itself, has a weak clout over these illegal installations even when trouble strikes.

Another problem is in the matter of getting the proper permit for its installation. It is claimed that the local government unit is the one who gives out approval for the required barangay (village) permit, which is a requirement before a building permit is given by the town or city building official's office. But currently, billboards still find their way onto the street and are installed regardless of the absence or presence of permit from the town or city level.

This indicates that more often, the current method of billboard installation does not pass through a legal process of standard permit system ran by relevant government bodies.

An understanding of the various government agencies and its roles is needed to identify the local guidelines and the laws implemented by them. On the other hand, the laws, rules, and guidelines that govern the business of billboard advertisement should be analyzed to identify gaps, weakness, deficiencies, and possibilities, among other things. This to some extent will also help identify and explain the problems associated with the current situation of billboard advertising.

The summary of different standards governing billboards in **Figure 11** represents a general character of the rules in the local context as compared to those of some selected cities. **Figure 9** shows a comparison of rules in relation to the sizes and distances permitted by these places. Two other countries, initially, are represented to give a comparison and to stress on the discrepancies of the existing local laws. Some features of a proposed Senate Bill regarding the installation of billboards are also shown.

A close examination of this summary reveals the existence of conflicting rules and regulations, not to mention the lack of it, of the government agencies in-charged to regulate and control the installation of billboard structures. The National Building Code of the Philippines, for instance, specifies that a 10 meter setback from the right-of-way must be enforced if a free standing (self supporting) billboard is to be installed. However, in reality at the site, this is mostly ignored and the issue of who is accountable in enforcing this rule becomes blurred and ambiguous as one gets through the process of tracing who really should be.

The MMDA, which is empowered to enforce the urban development of Metro Manila, is both legally and administratively in conflict and in continuous wrangling with the local officials of various cities and municipalities comprising Manila over the issue of jurisdiction, among other things. And quite recently, over billboards! Added to that is a regulation that is clearly revealed here in **Figure 11** as an insufficient and lacking regulation if it is to have a firm control to its urban development goals, if there is any. And so, MMDA and the local city agencies is not quite ready with its own legally enacted set of rules to regulate billboard advertisement because of its ambiguity and also probably because of overlapping control. Yet at present, it is both the DPWH and MMDA that monitors these structures and even demolish the 'unwanted' structures.

The problems identified above must have been the causes of chaotic proliferation of billboards that continues even to the outermost part of Metro Manila today. The unregulated situation of billboard advertisement could result to bigger urban problems in the near future, if it remains unchecked.

This study hopes to provide a wider public understanding and cognizance of the problems associated with billboards. The next phases of this study, which will be the object of

future reports, will focus on the following; a) the issue of how and why billboard advertisement in the Philippines is becoming an inevitable urban reality, as well as b) a proposed methodology in determining the appropriateness of billboards; dealing with its design, location, and installation, among other things.

#### IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

This initial part of the study shows the characteristics of billboard advertisement in EDSA Philippines, indicating a strong and dynamic emerging industry. It however reveals a rather chaotic, loosely regulated billboard industry resulting to an ambiguous process by which billboards are put up in major thorough fares and highways in Metro Manila.

It also provided a glance at the structure of the process and the organization behind the billboard advertisement, showing a non-standard set up of entities influencing the emerging industry. And finally a classification is proposed, which is geared towards a deeper understanding of billboards advertisement.

This study, banking on the notion that they are an inevitable element of the urban environment, takes the position that billboards are here to stay and therefore must be dealt with squarely. Perhaps, studies of this type could help 'defang' the billboards and make them perform less than a menace, therefore contributing to the richness of the urban life. If that is attained, then billboards do not have to go after all.

The study would recommend further analysis of the billboard situation, widening the scale and scope, in order to arrive at a more conclusive set of findings that will serve as strong basis for the formulation of the mechanics of the proposed methodology for determining the appropriateness of billboards, dealing with its design, location, and installation, among others.

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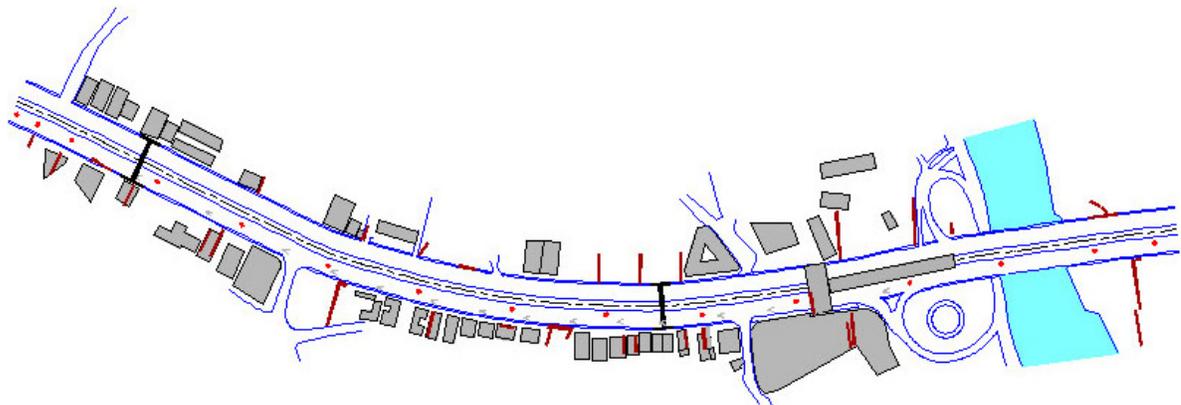


Figure 2: Site Map of study area with location of billboards

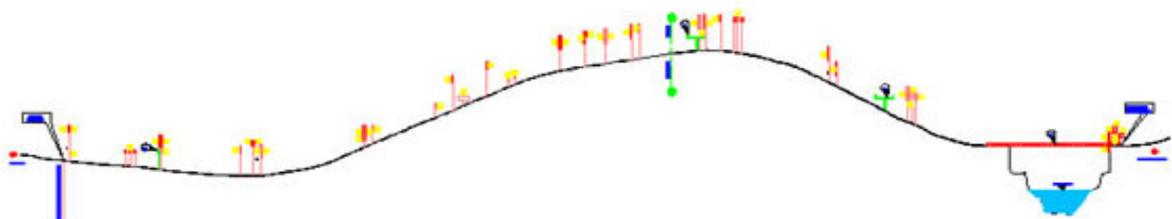


Figure 3: Profile Section of study area with billboards

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Target-location	qty	%
NB-R	29	30.85%
NB-L	15	15.96%
NB-LP	4	4.26%
NB-RP	5	5.32%
NB-MRT	2	2.13%
SB-R	18	19.15%
SB-L	16	17.02%
SB-RP	2	2.13%
SB-LP	1	1.06%
SB-MRT	1	1.06%
SB-O	1	1.06%
total	94	100.00%

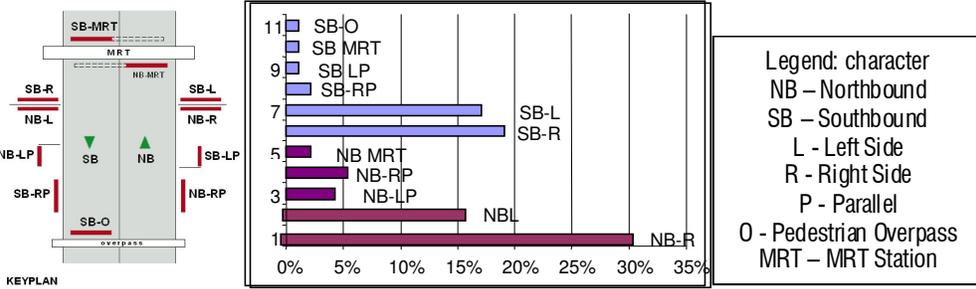


Figure 4: Comparison of volume with the different views

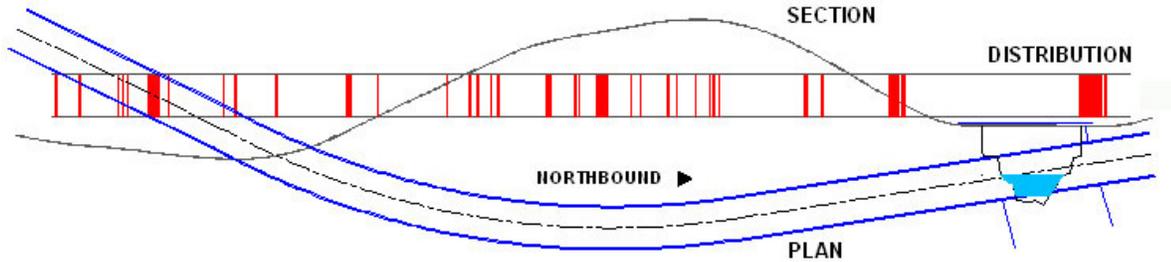


Figure 5: Section Profile with Distribution of Billboards

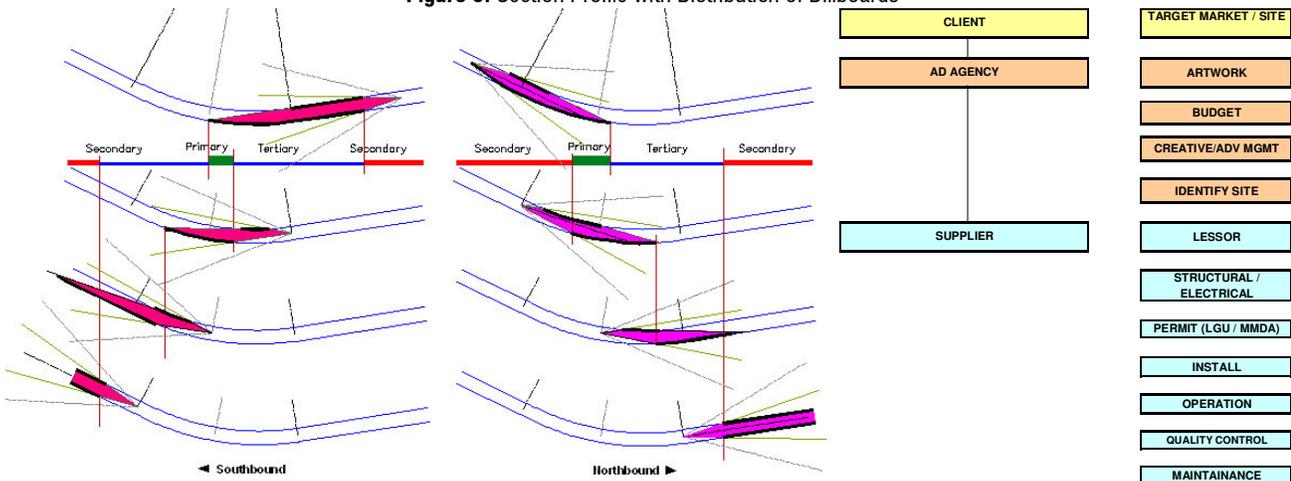


Figure 6: Derivation of categorized area

Figure 7: Process of Installation; How Billboards Find their Way onto our Streets?

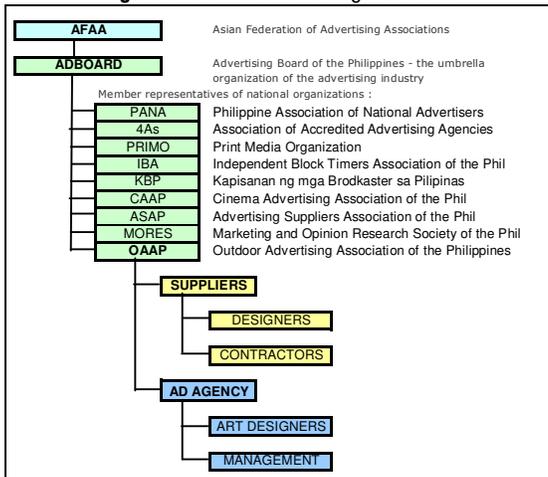


Figure 8: The Organizational Structure of the Industry

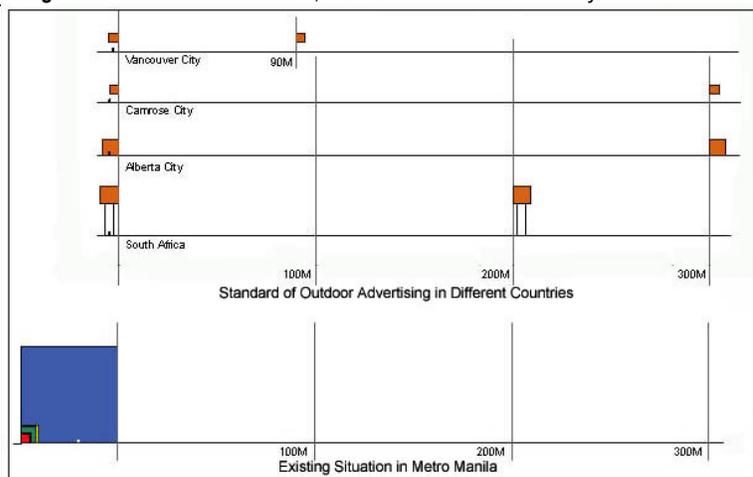


Figure 9: Comparison in Sizes and Distances

Mobility	Structure Support	Format	Medium	Placing	Location	Content
Immobile	Free Standing (self-supporting)	Digital/video	screen	Ground	Thoroughfares/ Coliseum/ Arena	Event/Product/ Slogan
		Electronic				
		Box Type				
		Spectaculars	Tarpaulin			
		Large Format	tri-folds			
	Mechanical					
	Non-Free Standing	Banner	Tarpaulin/cloth/ plastic	Projecting/ Hang/Wall	Thoroughfares	Event/Product/ PoliticalAds/ Greeting/ Slogan
		Box Type	Sp. Tarpuline/ Fiberglass	Ground/Roof/ Projecting	Airport/ Malls/ Interiors	product
		Digital	Screen		Thoroughfares, Comm'l establishments	
		Electronic	Tarpaulin	Wall Facade	Thoroughfares/Coliseum/Arena	
Drop Down		Thoroughfares, Parks				
Building Wrap			Any building possible	Event/Product		
Poster		Tarpaulin/ cloth/ plastic	Projecting/Hang/ Wall mounted	Thoroughfares/Any structure possible	Event/Product/ PoliticalAds/ Greeting/ Slogan	
Street Furniture	Fiberglass/ plastic	Ground	Sidewalk/waiting sheds	product		
Mobile	Public Utility Vehicle advertisement	Poster/sticker	Plastic/paper/ tarpaulin/sticker	Wrap around/ On top	On vehicle	Event/Product/ PoliticalAds/
	Private Vehicle Adv		Wrap around			
	Special Billboard Vehicle	Box type	Tarpaulin/cloth/ plastic	Stand up		

**Figure 10: Classification of Billboards**

**Summary of Different Standards**

Parameters	Country	Vancouver City	Camrose City	Alberta city at highway	South Africa	Philippines		
						NBC PD1096	MMDA Reg No. 04-004	Proposed Senate.Bill 1714
<b>Sizes</b>								
super size					81sqm			
large size		21.5sqm max	20sqm max	65sqm max	3 x 12 m or 36sqm max			28sqm max limit 1 face
allowance				2.5 sqm max				
str encroachment		X						X
wall mounted			not exceed eaveline			300mm max	300mm max	
allowance from height position				1.6m				
					perpendicular			
<b>Distances</b>								
max height			9.1 m	8.0m	25m	6m- grd signs	6m- grd signs	15.25m max
vert clearance- wall mtd				3.0m		3.0m	3.0m	
vertical clearance			7.5 m if w/in 200m		2.4m	3m to 5m	3m to 5m	10m
spacing between billboards		90 m	300 m min					305m(<4lanes) 610m (>4lanes)
60 or less					120m			
70km/h or less				300m min	200m min			
80km/h or less				600m min	200m min			
81-100 km/h				1000m min	250m min			
radial dist bet 2 BB on opp side			300 m min	300m min				305m min
projecting signs			Com'l/Ind'l max 9 sqm					
setback frm ROW			5 m	6m min		10m min - self-supporting	10m min - self-supporting	7.6m min
to a street		5m						
to a bus sign		15m						
to res. Area		min 60m						
above roof line		300mm	X			parapet height	parapet height	X
intersection (intrchnge/ undrpass/bridge-ROW)					100m rad.frm cntr-intrscn			305m
historic/schl/chrch/hosp/g ovt/conv.cntr/etc								305m
<b>Permitted or not</b>								
neon signs distance						4m	X	
on roads, center island, sidewalks, post, open							X	305m

note: X means not allowed

**Figure 11: Other Standards Compared to Local**