



Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Bureau of Highway Maintenance
Outdoor Advertising Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Outdoor Advertising Directional Signs

Can Directional Signs be placed along interstates and primary highways?

Yes, with a state-issued permit.

Can I place the Directional Sign on the highway right of way?

No. The entire sign, including overhang and landscaping, must be located entirely on private property.

Does the Wisconsin Department of Transportation make and install the sign?

No. The applicant is responsible for fabrication, installation and maintenance of the sign.

How much does it cost?

Application fee: **\$175**

Annual renewal fee: **\$50**

Can any activity or attraction qualify?

No. Only activities and attractions articulated in s. Trans 201.05(1)(h) Wis. Adm. Code may qualify.

- **Public Places Owned and Operated by Governments:** Must provide appropriate documentation that the site is owned and/or managed by a governmental entity.
- **Natural Phenomena:** Sites of interest to the traveling public because of the opportunity to observe and/or experience nature, including geology, flora and/or fauna.
- **Natural Scenic Beauty:** Natural or scenic areas such as beaches, gorges, nature facilities, nature preserves, nature sanctuaries, observation points, observation towers, parks, scenic areas, trails, lakes, waterfalls, waterways, and bluffs.
- **Historic:** Included in official registers of designated state or federal historic sites. Must provide documentation.
- **Educational:** Sites with a primary purpose to impart knowledge or skills through observation or participation. Examples include museums, aquariums, wildlife facilities, wildlife preserves, wildlife sanctuaries and zoos. Can include agri-tourism businesses such as breweries, gardens, cheese factories, vineyards, orchards, and wineries if regular tours are conducted. Must provide documentation of regular tours.
- **Cultural:** Sites dedicated or related to the appreciation of the arts such as galleries, halls of fame, museums, concert halls, and performing arts facilities.
- **Scientific:** Site where scientific studies and/or research are conducted.
- **Religious:** Sites of spiritual significance, religious sites or shrines. Does not typically include cathedrals, churches, chapels, synagogues, temples or mosques, unless the site is regionally recognized and tours are conducted for non-members at least on a weekly basis. Must provide documentation of regular tours.

What kind of visitor count do I need to qualify?

For an interstate, the attraction must have an annual visitor count of **15,000 or more**.

For a primary highway or other controlled route, the attraction must have:

- a. **10,000 or more** annual visitors; or
- b. **5,000 or more** annual visitors and attraction/activity is on the federal historic register; or
 - Applicant must provide proof of listing on federal register.
- c. **2,500 or more** annual visitors, of which at least 25% of the visitors must reside outside the county in which the tourist attraction is located.
 - Applicant must provide proof of visitor addresses residing outside the county where the activity/attraction is located.

Documentation of required visitor counts or other above requirements must be provided along with the application and fee. See *Interim Directional Sign Installation Application and Permit* for documentation requirements.

Can I put my sign anywhere?

No. The sign must be located within a certain distance from the attraction.

If the sign will be located on an interstate, it must be within **75 air miles** of the attraction.

If the sign will be located on a primary highway or other controlled route, it must be with **50 air miles** of the attraction.

How many signs can I place?

The maximum is **three** signs per highway, per direction of traffic.

Are there any size restrictions?

Maximum total area is **150 square feet**.

Maximum length or height is **20 feet**.

Are there any spacing restrictions?

Yes. Directional signs must be at least **1 mile** apart from any other directional sign facing the same direction of travel.

Directional signs cannot be within **2,000 feet** of an interchange or intersection at grade, or be located within 2,000 feet of a rest area, parkland, or scenic area.

Can I place pictures or other graphics on a Directional Sign?

No. Descriptive words or phrases, and pictorial or photographic representations are prohibited by state and federal regulations.

What kind of message can I have on a Directional Sign?

Message content for directional signs is limited to:

- The identification of the activity or attraction and
- Directional information useful to the traveler in locating the attraction, such as mileage, route numbers, or exit numbers.
- Descriptive words or phrases of the activity or its surroundings are strictly prohibited.

Can I have a sponsor (profit or nonprofit) listed on the sign?

No. Message content for directional signs is limited to:

- The identification of the activity or attraction and
- Directional information useful to the traveler in locating the attraction, such as mileage, route numbers, or exit numbers.

Can I change the message on a Directional Sign?

Yes. However, approval from the department is required in advance of any message change for a different activity or attraction than was originally approved.

A **new application** must be submitted along with the **\$175** application fee.

Where can I find more information?

s. 84.30(3)(a) Wis. Stats.

s. Trans 201.05 Wis. Adm. Code

Interim Policy – Directional Signs

[Outdoor advertising directional signs webpage](#)

Or contact the WisDOT Region Outdoor Advertising Signing Coordinator