

Converting Traditional Static Billboards to Digital Billboards

A Memo by Joshua Sudekum

The profitability of digital billboards provides a powerful incentive for outdoor advertising companies to put up as many as possible. With their changing message displays, digital billboards allow companies to sell ad space to as many as ten times as many clients as static ones. They also allow advertisers to change their content more frequently and at little cost. These factors drive significant upside for outdoor advertising companies.

To help convince local officials to allow digital billboards, sign companies often propose to remove a certain number of static signs in exchange for each new digital sign. This approach is a tacit acknowledgment by the billboard industry that billboards are undesirable, and that reducing their overall numbers is a way to bargain with communities. If communities accept compromises like this, they should strive for the largest possible ratio.









Figure 1.













| City | Static-to-Digital Ratio | Conditions |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| St. Petersburg, FL | 13.8-to-1 | All 83 static billboard faces (41 structures) to be removed before first digital installation. |
| Tampa, FL | 10-to-1 | |
| Los Angeles, CA | 9-to-1; 2:1 | Committed to removing 120+ static in order to install 71 new digital. |
| Stockton, CA | 9-to-1 | |
| Tacoma, WA | 5.4-to-1*, 5-to-1**, 7.8-to-1*** | Proposed: *first 10, **next 7, ***last 21 billboards. Agreement requires surrender of relocation certificates. |
| Kansas City, MO | 7-to-1 | |
| Gulfport, MS | 6-to-1 | |
| San Jose, CA | 6-to-1 | An increase from previous 4-to-1. |
| Fontana, CA | 6-to-1 | 3-to-1 if static is double-sided. |
| Montgomery County, TX | 5-to-1 | Historical ordinance; digital now prohibited. |
| San Antonio, TX | 4-to-1 | Capped new digital at 24 billboards. |
| Vallejo, CA | 4-to-1 | Regardless of sign faces on structure. Max two sign faces per digital structure. |
| Orlando, FL | 4-to-1 | |
| Millcreek, UT | 3.2-to-1 | Agreement between city and billboard owner; not an ordinance. |
| Houston, TX | 3-to-1 | Proposed in 2018. |
| South Kansas City, KA | 3-to-1 | |
| San Diego, CA | 3-to-1 | |
| Pomona, CA | 3-to-1 | |
| Victorville, CA | 3-to-1 | |
| New Orleans, LA | 2-to-1; 3-to-1 | Guidelines offered by City Planning commission, also capped total number of billboards allowed. |
| Lee's Summit, MO | 2-to-1 | Digital signs allowed 10% larger than replaced static. |

Figure 2.

| City | Static-to-Digital (square footage) | Conditions |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Clay County, FL | 1-to1*; 2-to-1**, 3-to-1*** | *For tri-vision signs (only square footage of one face). **For owners with <15 billboards. ***For owners with ≥15 billboards. |
| Bentonville, AR | 2.5 to-1 | Originally 4-to-1. Changed in 2016 to square-footage to account for size differences. |
| Savannah, GA | 2.5-to-1 | |
| Los Angeles, CA | 2-to-1* | *110,000-to-55,000 |

Figure 3.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13.8-to-1 ST. PETERSBURG, FL |  | <i>All 83 static billboard faces (41 structures) to be removed before first digital installation.</i> |
| 10-to-1 TAMPA, FL |  | |
| 9-to-1 / 2-to-1 LOS ANGELES, CA |  | <i>Committed to removing 120+ static to install 71 new digital.</i> |
| 9-to-1 STOCKTON, CA |  | |
| 7.8-to-1* TACOMA, WA |  | <i>*Proposed: 5.4-to-1 (first 10 billboards); 5-to-1 (next 7); 7.8-to-1 (last 21). Agreement requires surrender of relocation certificates.</i> |
| 7-to-1 KANSAS CITY, MO |  | |
| 6-to-1 GULFPORT, MS |  | |
| 6-to-1 SAN JOSE, CA |  | <i>An increase from previous 4-to-1.</i> |
| 6-to-1 FONTANA, CA |  | <i>3-to1 if static billboard is double sided.</i> |

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>5-to-1 MONTGOMERY COUNTY, TX</p> |  <p><i>Historical ordinance; digital is now prohibited.</i></p> |
| <p>4-to-1 SAN ANTONIO, TX</p> |  <p><i>Capped number of new digital billboards at 24.</i></p> |
| <p>4-to-1 VALLEJO, CA</p> |  <p><i>Maximum of two sign faces per digital structure.</i></p> |
| <p>4-to-1 ORLANDO, FL</p> |  |
| <p>3.2-to-1 MILLCREEK, UT</p> |  <p><i>Agreement between City and billboard owner; not an ordinance.</i></p> |
| <p>3-to-1 HOUSTON, TX</p> |  <p><i>Proposed in 2018.</i></p> |
| <p>3-to-1 SOUTH KANSAS CITY, KS</p> |  |
| <p>3-to-1 SAN DIEGO, CA</p> |  |
| <p>3-to-1 POMONA, CA</p> |  |
| <p>3-to-1 VICTORVILLE, CA</p> |  |
| <p>2-to-1; 3-to-1 NEW ORLEANS, LA</p> |  <p><i>Guidelines proposed by Planning Commission; also mentions cap on total number of billboards allowed.</i></p> |
| <p>2-to-1 LEE'S SUMMIT, MO</p> |  <p><i>Allows digital billboards to be 10% larger than static billboards.</i></p> |

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