



## SUBIC BAY FREEPORT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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6 May 2009

**NARCISO L. ABAYA**

President, Bases Conversion & Development Authority  
31st St., Crescent Park West  
Bonifacio Global City, Taguig  
Metro Manila 1634

Subject: **Prohibition of Advertisement Billboards Along the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEX)**

Dear Mr. Abaya,

The thrill first time visitors get when they see the SCTEX – bounded by hills, trees, farms, and vast expanses of fields – is awesome! It makes us proud that, indeed, the Philippines is beautiful.

Beautiful landscapes are the foundation of the tourism industry. Most European countries prohibit billboards; among them Great Britain, Germany, France, Ireland, and Austria. It is one of the reasons these countries are so charming to tourists. Many US states have billboard limitations while some that are not are already starting to take their billboards down. Many tourist destinations disallow billboards: Williamsburg VA, Martha's Vineyard MA, Reno NV, Key West FL, Aspen CO, and many more. All of these states are major tourist destinations.

Subic Bay is also now becoming a major tourist destination. The past Lenten week saw more than 150 thousand tourists flocking to Subic who mostly used the SCTEX coming here. Everyone was impressed at how beautiful the sceneries along the SCTEX are. SCTEX, it looks like, has also become a tourist attraction itself.

The Subic Bay Freeport Chamber of Commerce (SBFCC) Board of Directors, on behalf not only of its members, but also of all the residents around this area, wants it to stay that way. We believe that it is in the best interests of the public to prohibit advertisement billboards from the SCTEX... and there is a brewing movement to make this so (see attached).

The City of Olongapo already passed a resolution for the abatement and dismantling of billboards along SCTEX. The Subic-Clark Alliance for Development Council (SCADC), last year, also started the movement for further greening of the SCTEX to enhance the road's aesthetic values – planting of more trees, not "planting" of billboards is the program's thrust.

The majority of motorists hate billboards. Each billboard that is erected blots out a little scenery, weakens the tourism foundation, and makes our country a little less beautiful. The purpose of roadways is transportation, not viewing huge advertisements. The government and ultimately, the people, have paid for the roadways and should not be subjected to unavoidable viewing of undesired advertising.

The public has a right to enjoy the beautiful terrain, expansive fields, and tranquil vistas along the SCTEX. In this spirit, we hope BCDA will take the lead to uphold Administrative Order No. 160 regulating the billboard industry and we trust BCDA will be at the forefront to protect the beautiful sceneries along our roads.

Sincerely,

**DANNY J. PIANO**  
President, SBFCC

Copies: Chairman, Subic-Clark Alliance for Development Council  
Chairman/Administrator, Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority  
Chairman, Clark Development Corporation  
Mayor and City Council, Olongapo City  
Other LGUs in Zambales, Bataan, and Tarlac

## “Save SCTEX from Billboards” Movement

*The thrill first time visitors get when they see the SCTEX surrounded by hills, trees, farms, and fields is awesome! It makes us proud that, indeed, the Philippines is beautiful.*



(credit: flicker.com)

**Considering the facts and information following, the Subic Bay Freeport Chamber of Commerce (SBFCC) believes that it is in the best interests of the people to prohibit advertisement billboards from the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEX).**

Our beautiful landscapes are the foundation of the tourism industry. Each billboard that is erected blots out a little scenery and weakens that foundation. The tourism industry, most particularly Subic and the surrounding areas depend heavily on natural sceneries commencing from the SCTEX.

We are losing our precious irreplaceable scenery with natural and man-made landscapes being blighted with large unsightly signs.

While signs provide valuable information, but like telemarketing, and email solicitations, outdoor advertising is being taken to excess. It is unnecessary and inappropriate to advertise products and services of no immediate use to a traveler or tourist (such as sneakers, underwear, jeans, vitamins, wine, hard liquor, or cell phone services) on large signs in our landscape.

**About two-thirds of outdoor ads are for products and services of no immediate benefit to a traveler.**

There are sufficient signs for all tourist-and traveler-oriented businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and gas stations to use.

The general populace simply does not like advertisement billboards, finding them to be a nuisance. This is shown in numerous surveys, world wide. Depending on the specific question and how posed, responses ran from up to 75% against billboards. The purpose of roadways is transportation, not viewing advertisements. People should not be subjected to unneeded visual solicitations and should be protected from them just as they should be protected from telemarketing and junk emails.

Cluttering of highways with signs is making the highway unattractive to tourists. The beautiful vistas that can be seen while travelling at the SCTEX could gradually be marred by large billboards. This proliferation appears to be happening everywhere, making every place look like Manila.

Regulation of billboards is needed. Government regulation should always be held to a minimum, but further regulation of billboards is needed to prevent degradation of our surroundings. If one cannot build a factory in a residential area, why should they install a billboard in a beautiful landscape?

Regulating billboards is not difficult or costly. Regulation is easy and adds little or no cost to the existing budget. In fact, the state of Vermont experienced a 50 percent rise in tourism spending in the first two years it became billboard free.

From a 1994 opinion by the U.S. Supreme Court in *City of Ladue v. Gilleo* (114 S. Ct. 2038).

*“They take up space and may obstruct views, distract motorists, displace alternate uses of land and pose other problems that legitimately call for regulation.”*

A widely disliked feature of the Philippine capital, are 2,500 steel-framed advertising billboards –some as large as four-story buildings – towering over the city's traffic-snarled highways. Anti-billboard campaigners have been warning for years that these often flimsily erected structures are accidents waiting to happen... typhoon Milenyo in 2006 proved them right.

Packing 130 kmh winds, the typhoon knocked down about 40 billboards, one of which killed a motorist on the main Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA). Several other people were injured across the city by falling billboards. The collapsed billboards were also blamed for hampering the restoration of power along major roads after the grid was shut down during that storm.

Four days after the storm, Senator Miriam Santiago, who has long called for a ban, presented her proposed Anti-Billboard Blight Act and delivered a speech, entitled “We Are Living in a Billboard Hell.” Below are extracts from that seething speech.

### **WE ARE LIVING IN BILLBOARD HELL**

According to the Outdoor Advertising Association of the Philippines (OAAP), which has commendably cooperated with the Senate, the estimated annual revenues of the outdoor advertising industry is P1.8 billion... With the proper exceptions all other billboard advertisers and their advertising agencies should be charged with corporate greed, the unthinking, unfeeling, unreasoning pursuit of corporate profits, without any sense of social responsibility, and without any sense of shared destiny.

Moreover, the defenders of billboards sporting phony arguments that billboards are or so-called part of freedom of speech, and sporting phony arguments that billboard owners are so-called corporate taxpayers and providers of employment, should be branded with ignorance of the law and unconscionable refusal to face the facts of the uglification and aesthetic desertification of our homeland.

An FX driver was killed and four others injured, at the corner of Estrella St. and Edsa Avenue in Makati during the height of typhoon Milenyo, when three giant commercial billboards fell in the same city, and in Muntinlupa. There were similar reported incidents in the past.

Innocent human beings were torn from their lives, and taken, never to return, from the bosom of their loving, bereaved families, simply because nobody dared to face the reality that we Filipinos are living in billboard hell.

What other deaths and destruction were caused by the total of 21 billboards that reportedly fell in Metro Manila? In the language of the Civil Code, who will pay the amount of damages for death caused by criminal billboards that violated the requirements of the National Building Code? Who shall be liable for the loss of the earning capacity of the deceased? Who shall support their families? Who shall relieve their families of unspeakable and lifetime mental anguish? For you cannot resurrect the dead.

Every life given by the intelligent designer is unique and irreplaceable. If a family member of the defenders of billboards died because a giant billboard hit him on the head, would the defenders still be singing hymns to exploitative capitalist economics? Is the biblical Golden Rule already passé in this callous, alienated, impersonal society?

For its part, the outdoor advertising industry argues that the billboards benefit the economy by stimulating consumer spending... and it has promised to raise construction standards.

In late 2006, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo ordered an inventory of all billboards and created a task force to investigate the owners of the billboards that had collapsed, those who had put them up, and the officials who had granted them permits for sanctions.

The Philippines Senate had also unanimously approved the Anti-Billboard Blight Act in November 2006, setting out new and stricter regulations regarding the erection of billboards.

## Visual reminders

Do we really want horrifying visions such as these on the SCTEX?



(credits: Sidney Snoeck)

Do we really want SCTEX to look like these?



(credits: Sidney Snoeck)

## Billboard prohibition is not a radical new idea.

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the Central Luzon area. Controlling signage and prohibiting advertisement billboards will attract tourists and boost the tourism industry, which employs many more people than outdoor advertising.

Cities and towns need freedom to regulate signage. Some countries in the industrialized world have developed model sign ordinances that planning administrators in cities, villages, towns, and barangays may use as a reference. We believe that local government should continue to have the authority to regulate signage within their jurisdictions. The limitation of signs nationwide along roads with national highway numbers would supplement local regulations. It would help prevent large signs in neighboring cities from lining the borders of cities with good signage regulation.

## Elsewhere in the world...

Most European countries prohibit billboards, among them Great Britain, Germany, France, Ireland & Austria. It is one of the reasons they are so charming to tourists.

In 2007, the world's fourth-largest metropolis and Brazil's most important city, São Paulo, became the first city outside of the communist world to put into effect a radical, near-complete ban on outdoor advertising. São Paulo's "Lei Cidade Limpa" or Clean City Law was an unexpected success.

Several US states have billboard limitations: Alaska & Hawaii, Maine & Vermont, Michigan, and Oregon among others. The first four states have taken them all down. That's right; there is no off-premise outdoor advertising there – no billboards in the fields or along the approaches to attractive towns.

Businesspeople in these countries recognize that an unmarred landscape promotes tourism and benefits them in the long run.

Billboards are designed to distract, and that may in turn cause drivers to misjudge traffic conditions or misinterpret a traffic signal, thereby increasing the potential for accidents. A study on driver behavior by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration showed that distractions in which a driver spends more than two seconds looking elsewhere than the road contributed to 22% of accidents.

## Alternatives

There are alternatives to billboards. There is a system of Tourist-Oriented Directional Signs, small inexpensive signs allowed along all roads including county roads. This system levels the playing field for small business and should be expanded.

Logo signs, usually several on one signboard, is another excellent system available to tourist-oriented businesses.



## Conclusion

The SCTEX should be considered the jewel in the crown of Central Luzon. Why not keep it that way for all to enjoy the unspoiled beauty of paradise for the purpose of enriching our lives, enhancing our business climate, and maintaining our attractiveness to tourists? The Subic Bay Freeport Chamber of Commerce and the City of Olongapo are at the forefront of a movement to make this so. Let this be a manifestation of our commitment to the growing tourism industry and to the health and well-being of travelers and motorists who, instead of being subjected to frustrations and stress, ought to have a pleasant and enjoyable ride on their way to their destinations instead.

Let us all save the SCTEX from billboards!