

## **Class 1b ~ Gantry billboards**

*Gantry Billboards* have a very obtrusive character due to its size, height, unavoidability and its position right in front of the approaching motorist. Gantry structures can be seen as visually intrusive, complicated and dominant. The previous SAMOAC did not make provision for *Gantry Billboards* due to their huge visual and road safety impact. However, various municipalities have started to allow *Gantry Billboards* due to the income derived from such billboards. It has therefore become necessary to reconsider the inclusion of this sign type into the Draft Revised SAMOAC (July 2008).

*Gantry Billboards* have a larger inherent potential for reducing the safety of the road environment than most other sign types. The preferred location for *Gantry Billboards* is normally across higher order urban roads. Due to the position of these signs the outdoor advertising message cannot be ignored. This fact, together with the high traffic volume and speed on these roads, results in a high traffic safety hazard. Due to its prominence *Gantry Billboards* may easily overshadow nearby traffic signals and especially overhead signals. On freeways with traffic gantries any advertising gantry would be in direct competition with such traffic signs due to a similarity in height, size and form and would therefore pose an even more serious traffic hazard. It therefore makes sense that *Gantry Billboards* should not be allowed on freeways.

Due to its size and unavoidable nature *Gantry Billboards* multiply the normal aesthetic impact of outdoor advertising. In visual terms the *Gantry Billboard* forms a very compelling focal point of a vista with the front window of the approaching vehicle providing the visual frame for such a vista. The higher the order of the road which is being spanned and the larger the number of traffic lanes the larger the impact of the gantry structure will be. There seems to be a certain gantry width or length after which the visual impact of the gantry structure increases exponentially.

As a general rule advertisements and signs should not show against roof or skylines or any other prominent line in the urban landscape. Due to its size and position *Gantry Billboards* tend to show against the horizon. This tendency increases as the motorist approaches the sign.

Due to the visual dominance of *Gantry billboards* special attention should be given to advertising contents. Advertising structure and contents should enhance each other and both should enhance the local character of the urban landscape. More artistic and simplistic designs with subtle colours and a minimum of copy (text) should be preferred. It might be necessary to provide specific conditions in this regard by means of the SEA-procedure applied to determine the number and position of *Gantry billboards*.

One of the preferred positions for advertising gantries is at urban gateways which can be seen as one of the most sensitive visual environments. It is therefore of the utmost importance that urban gateways be treated as areas of maximum control in

accordance with the Draft Revised SAMOAC (July 2008) in order to prevent *Gantry billboards* from being erected at such gateways. ([See Urban Landscapes ~ Areas of Maximum Control](#)). GANTRY BILLBOARDS SHOULD NEVER BE USED AS GATEWAY STRUCTURES WELCOMING THE VISITOR TO A CITY (see [Class 4f](#) for this purpose). Such gateways or entrances to cities play a crucial role in the definition of local sense of place. It extends a welcome to the traveller and predefines the eventual impression left in the mind of the tourist after his visit to the city. In some cases local authorities may be persuaded to allow gantry signs as archways to announce the visitor's entrance to the city. However, due to the negative impact of gantry billboards in general, the only impression it will create in the mind of the visitor is an impression of visual degradation. One should take into consideration that the mind of a tired traveller is very susceptible to negative impressions. Instead of welcoming the visitor he might rather be discouraged from staying in that particular city for any significant period of time or from visiting it again.

In order to save costs the outdoor advertising industry prefers standardised outdoor advertising structures, which have a very detrimental effect on sense of place in most instances. This is especially true of larger structures such as gantries. If a large number of *Gantry Billboards* are allowed it may change the whole character of an urban area.

As is the case with *Super Billboards* the same question should be asked whether two sign classes with a maximum size of 81m<sup>2</sup> should be allowed and if both are allowed whether the numbers of both class 1a and 1b should not be halved in order to absorb the combined impact of these billboards.

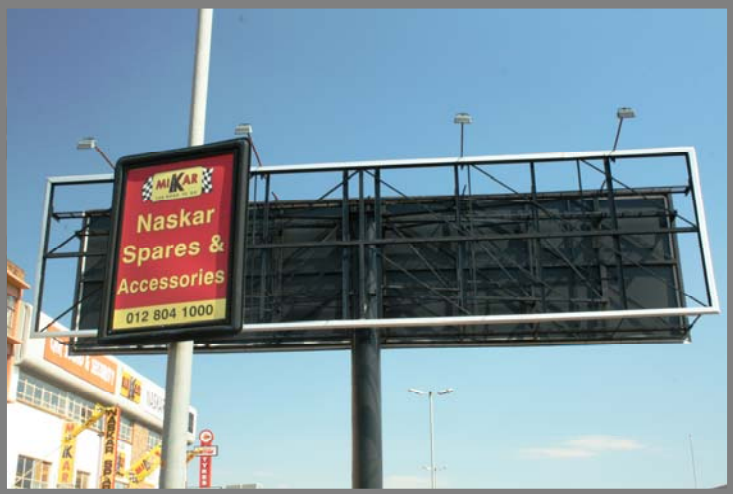
A minimum clear height of 5,2 m is required for gantry billboards which makes ample provision for a double decker bus (4,5m) to pass underneath the gantry structure.

The same note on the display period for *Super Billboards* is also relevant to *Gantry Billboards*.

For 'billboards' against bridges spanning roads see [Class 3e ~ Advertising on towers, bridges and pylons](#).



**An outdoor advertising message that cannot be avoided**



Gantry billboards can be very conspicuous and unsightly, even from the side and especially in the case of vacant advertising space.



<http://www.outdoorco.co.za>

The gantry above has a more human scale and is not so obtrusive. By dividing the billboard into two panels visual impact is reduced (right). From a visual point of few the location of this gantry has been well chosen since existing vegetation and the broad island help to reduce visual impact even further.





A gantry billboard next to Menlyn shopping centre in Pretoria. The style of this gantry harmonises with the architectural style of the centre and contributes to local character. Even the colours of advertising content reflects the bright colours used in the architecture of the shopping centre. This shows the value of site specific gantry design instead of making use of standardised structures at each and



A more artistic gantry structure with four smaller internally illuminated advertising panels from *JC Decaux*. This gantry billboard actually makes a positive contribution to the visual environment.

These attractive structures show the need for involving design professions such as architects in the design of billboard structures. If different structures are designed for each metropolitan area it may even contribute to local sense of place. Such structures may also play an important role in presenting South Africa to the rest of the world during the 2010 World Cup.



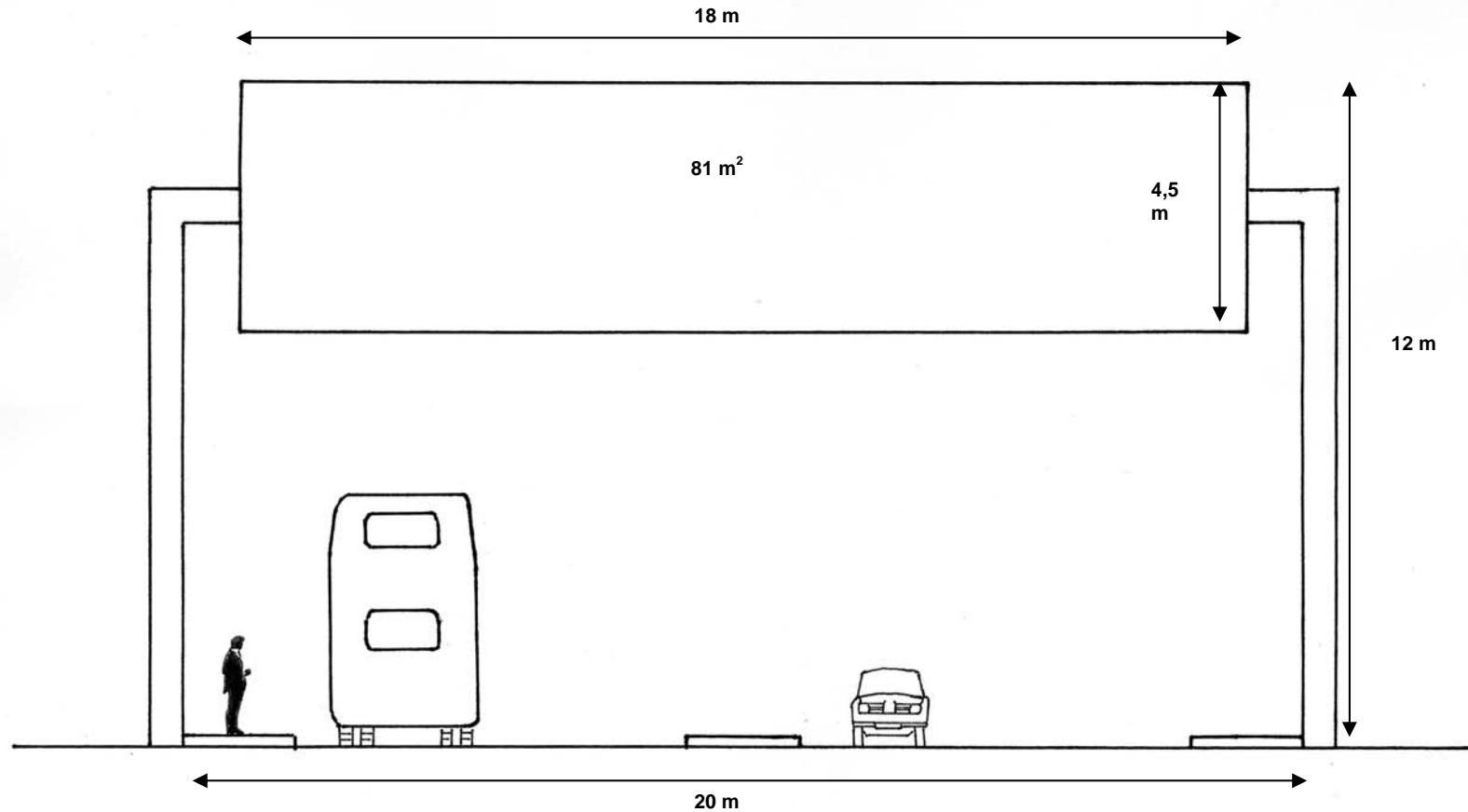
<http://www.jcdecaux.co.uk>



The gantry billboard at the top are incorporated into the visual environment in a very pleasant way even though it spans a 5-lane road. By making use of the street trees on both sides the obtrusive character and unyielding lines of the gantry structure are softened. The ridge in the background also prevents the gantry from being etched against the skyline. This shows the need for identifying similar sites for erecting gantry billboards in a coordinated and proactive manner. The SEA-procedure provides a very effective tool for this purpose. By being an integral part of a pleasant aesthetic environment the value and appeal of the advertising message are increased even though some of the text is not visible from the point where the photograph was taken. This fact actually stimulates the interest of the audience since the advertising messages is revealed in a sequential and provocative manner.

By means of its advertising content, which mirrors the thorn tree on the sidewalk, harmony is obtained between the gantry billboard and the surrounding visual environment in the bottom image. This shows the need for graphic designers and advertising agencies to look at advertising content in a more holistic manner. By making use of the SEA-procedure to identify all possible sites for gantry billboards (or any other billboards) in a metropolitan area beforehand, information on the visual environment surrounding each site can be obtained at an early stage and can serve as an input for site specific graphic design. By putting billboard sites out on tender a controlling authority may include site specific advertising content as a tender condition.

The Draft Revised SAMOAC makes provision for a maximum gantry height of 12 metre. Since gantry billboards are positioned directly in front and above the motorist anything higher than 12 metre will become overwhelming and will be out of touch with a human scale. The risk of increased wind velocity with an increase in height should also be a factor to consider when determining the height of such large billboards. The above example spans a four-lane road.



Compiled by Frans Jordaan