

# Class 4a ~ Service facility signs

## Introduction

Over the past few decades what was once known as garages with vehicle sales, workshops and fuel pumps and which had contributed to the life and character of many a town had been reduced to mere filling stations with a much narrower income base. In order to become more viable various functions have been and still are being added to these filling stations such as convenience stores, car washes, fast food outlets, rental of trailers and ATMs – functions which needs to be advertised to the passing motorist.

With this diversification of secondary functions in mind and in order to improve the user-friendliness of SAMOAC Class 4a has now been broadened to incorporate all signs relevant to filling stations and roadside service areas in one class. This includes signs that have previously formed part of the current [Class 2f ~ Banners & flags](#), [Class 3h ~ Veranda, balcony & under awning signs](#) and [Class 3j ~ Advertisements on forecourts of business premises](#).

Service facility signs can be divided into two main classes:

- **Primary signs** attracting and directing passing vehicles to filling stations and roadside service areas
- **Secondary signs** aimed at 'internal advertising' by providing more detail information on products and services once visitors have arrived at the filling station or roadside service area.

## Primary Signs

These signs may consist of:

- Combination or stack signs
- Signs against the fascia of the canopy covering the fuel pumps
- Signs attached to other buildings or structures forming part of the filling station or roadside service area.

Although not signs in the true sense of the word, the following advertising mechanisms can actually also be seen as primary signs since it fulfils the same function:

- The use of bright corporate colours and uniform structures/buildings
- The bright illumination of filling stations at night which may have to be reconsidered in the light of the growing power crisis in South Africa.

Combination or stack signs are normally the most effective and visual pleasing way of attracting and directing passing motorists to a filling station or roadside service area. In most cases such signs will be sufficient for this purpose. Primary signs attached to fuel pump canopies should only fulfil a supplementary role and should not be overdone since this may lead to a proliferation of such signs, while signs

attached to other buildings should only be used as primary signs in exceptional cases.

All messages aimed at the passing motorist should be incorporated into the stack sign, even services such as trailers for hire, roadworthy tests, licence renewals, type of petrol available, prices of petrol, etc. Generic sign symbols for all services which may be provided by filling stations and roadside service areas may simplify matters to a large extent and such an approach needs to be looked at in the future. Stack signs should be designed in such a manner that messages can be changed easily, e.g. when a certain type of petrol becomes unavailable.

## **Secondary Signs**

These signs may consist of:

- Free-standing signs of various formats displayed on the forecourts of filling stations or roadside service areas.
- Signs attached to fuel pumps and canopy pillars/ columns.
- Signs against buildings.

It is of the greatest importance that secondary signs should be kept within bounds in terms of position, size, height, numbers, etc. and that it should not be misused to fulfil a primary sign function by overwhelming the passing motorist.

### **A responsible approach to the management of advertisements and signs at filling stations and roadside service areas**

In recent years the number of signs, advertising furniture and other advertising devices at filling stations and roadside service areas, promoting the benefits of a variety of petroleum and other products and services, have increased progressively. It seems as if filling stations may now have acquired an affinity for impacting on the visual environment and traffic safety and should therefore be managed in a responsible and sustainable manner.

A proliferation of signs should be avoided by:

- Making provision for all services at a filling station or roadside service area to be indicated on a combination or stack sign. No other free-standing primary signs should be allowed. Banners attached to lamp posts may also be considered for this purpose.
- Using secondary signs for internal communication only, thereby providing the visitor with the necessary additional information in a functional and visual appealing manner once he has arrived at the filling station. Such signs should never be used to overwhelm the visitor by means of size, height or numbers.

As was already mentioned the role and function of primary and secondary signs should not be confused with one another.

As is the case with shopping centres, the [SEA](#) procedure should also be applied to filling stations and roadside service areas in order to be able to approach all the functional and visual aspects related to a variety of advertisements and signs in an integrated and coordinated manner. It is important that signs, advertising devices, buildings, structures and landscaping should form a harmonious whole. Matters may be simplified by covering all the filling stations of a particular petroleum company in a specific municipal area by means of a single [SEA](#). Matters may be simplified even further if the various petroleum companies develop their own directives in cooperation with DEAT and other role players on what signs and advertising furniture should be allowed at their franchises, taking a hierarchy of filling stations into account with regard to the type, number, height and size of signs. By preventing a proliferation of signs impacting on aesthetic resources and traffic safety the petroleum companies will be able to create a professional and environmental friendly image. Where a filling station is situated next to a shopping centre and forms a functional and visual unit with such a shopping centre a combined [SEA](#) for both functions might be the best approach.

Much has already been said and written by various parties regarding standardised franchise buildings, structures and advertising signs and furniture undermining local sense of place and contributing to a uniform world culture and placelessness which is detrimental to tourism. The above-mentioned [SEAs](#) or directives would provide the ideal opportunity for countering this tendency by designing advertising signs and furniture unique to each of South Africa's provinces, regions or even metropolitan areas based on local culture, tradition, history or any other element which may form part of that province, region or city's identity and sense of place. With the 2010 World Cup in mind such an initiative would make a major contribution in marketing South Africa and creating a tourism-friendly environment. This will provide petroleum companies with the ideal opportunity for making a meaningful contribution to the aesthetic environment and to tourism development.

Landscaping may also play an important role in enhancing local character and sense of place. Instead of using the same plant material for all their filling stations in order to contribute to a uniform corporate image, petroleum companies should rather look at plant material endemic to specific areas. It seems that in many cases 'ornamental' trees like palms are preferred in order not to obstruct signs and advertisements. This may also be a case of large palms transplanting easily. However, in South Africa with its hot climate, shade trees are of a much greater functional and aesthetic value than ornamentals. Attractive landscaping, enhancing the efficiency and appeal of key signs, may be seen as a more effective way of attracting customers to filling stations than using a large number of signs and advertisements. By causing visual blight and information overload a proliferation of signs will rather deter customers instead of attracting them.

Non-standardised buildings and structures may also play an important role in filling stations' contribution to local character. Although standardised buildings/structures and corporate colours play an important role as an advertising mechanism, corporate

colours on its own may still be sufficient for this purpose. However, it may also be assumed that standardised buildings and structures may be a more cost-effective way of constructing filling stations.

### **A step further**

The petroleum companies' contribution to the aesthetic environment and tourism development may even be taken a step further. In many a rural town somewhat dilapidated buildings can be found, which have once served as garages or are still serving as a filling stations, and which are still of great architectural and historical value. These buildings are only waiting to be restored to its previous glory and to be upgraded to serve as functional but unique filling stations. This would contribute even further to the enhancement of local sense of place and marketability of rural towns as tourism destinations.

### **Capacity Building**

By involving design schools students in designing landscape features and outdoor advertising structures and furniture at filling stations and roadside service areas, an important contribution in developing local artistic and design skills may be made.

### **Tourism Information**

A further contribution to tourism development is possible by providing tourism information at filling stations and roadside service areas along key tourism routes. This may consist of a simple brochure stand or a more elaborate outdoor advertising node and may cover both the local area and the route as a whole. **Outdoor advertising nodes** may contribute to social development and the of members of previously disadvantaged groups in various ways. It will also make an important contribution in preventing the proliferation of advertisements and signs along tourism routes and in urban areas.



## Primary Service Facility Signs



Combination or stack signs present the best opportunity for advertising filling stations' products and services. It also solves the problem of sign proliferation by congregating all the required signs onto one structure. The *ENGEN* sign below has very striking design lines, but the panels may be too small to be read without effort by passing motorists. This leaves the door open for secondary signs to be used as primary signs.

Stack signs should provide sufficient information without going into too much detail, which is the function of secondary signs. However, the information on the Shell sign (above) is inadequate by not indicating the financial institution providing the ATM service

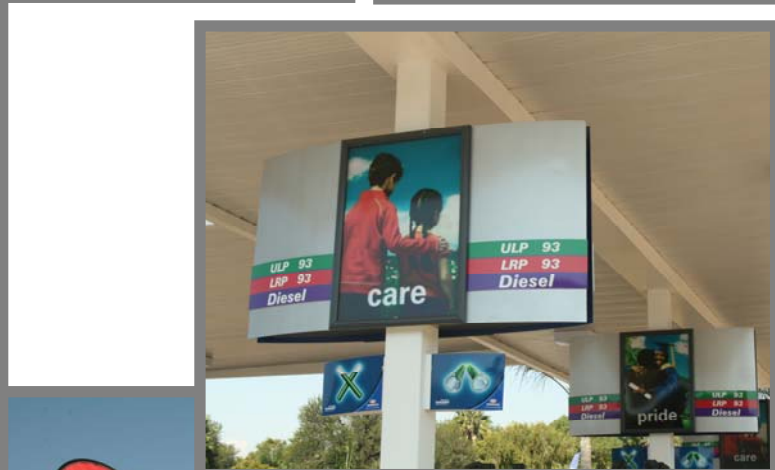
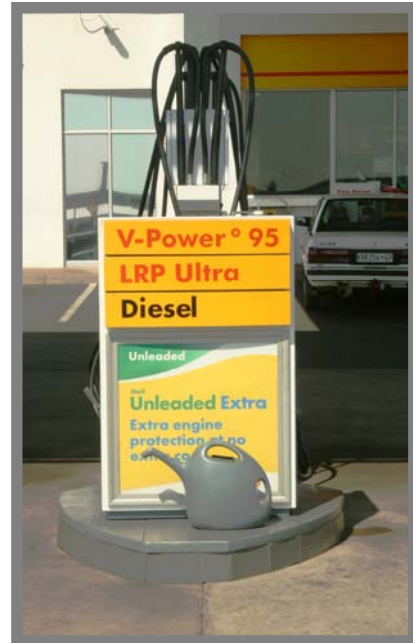


Fascia signs supplementing stack signs as primary service facility signs



## Secondary Service Facility Signs

... providing the customer with more information once he has arrived at the filling station.



## The Misuse of Secondary Signs as Primary Signs



Due to the lack of a stack sign this filling station (left) has to rely on a number of secondary signs to attract the passing motorist. These signs on the sidewalk are clearly directed towards a four-lane road instead of being aimed in the opposite direction. Their sheer size and the ease with which various shapes of banners can be erected have become quite a problem with regard to sign proliferation.



Left – The size of some secondary signs at petrol pumps tends to put such signs on the borderline between secondary and primary signs. However, this specific type of sign creates a pleasant visual experience through rhythm. It also does not directly face oncoming traffic in the nearby street.

Above & right: These two signs are very close to the street and aimed directly at the oncoming traffic. If it was meant to function as secondary signs aimed at motorists entering the filling station it should have been placed further back and turned to face such customers



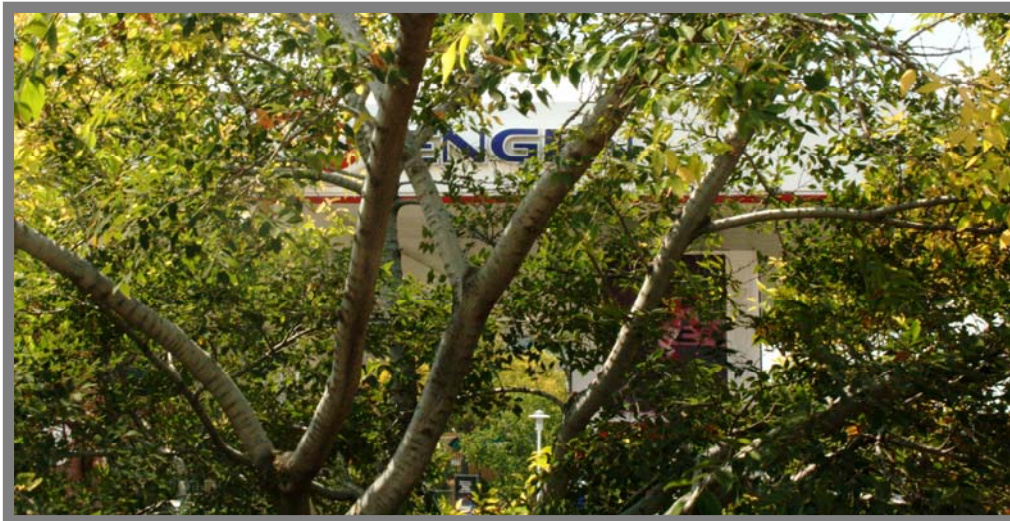
Above – Another case where tall banners have been clearly aimed at passing motorised traffic thereby fulfilling the function of primary signs instead of secondary signs.

## Detached Primary Signs



This sign is awkwardly placed and only contributes to the proliferation of signs. Indicating an important service it should rather be part of this filling station's stack sign.

## Landscaping Adding to Appeal and Local Character



In many cases palm trees are used in landscaping filling stations since it does not obstruct signs and advertisements. However, the subtlety of a partly concealed name or logo revealing only a hint of something may in many cases be much more effective than a full-frontal approach. The psychological attraction of shade in a hot climate should also be kept in mind.





## Contributing to Local Character and Tourism Potential



A unique fully operational filling station at Hall's Farm Stall outside Nelspruit (left).



An old garage in Prince Albert in Art Deco style (above), waiting to be developed in the same manner. This town has a unique historical character. The development of such a filling station and the preservation of something of the heyday of garages would make a major contribution to Prince Albert's appeal as a tourist destination.



The three images above illustrate the benefit of using historical buildings to contribute to local character. All three financial institutions are situated in Franschhoek. The uppermost building reflects the corporate image of that specific institution by means of standardised modern architecture. However, in a town such as Franschhoek with a strong sense of place such a standardised corporate approach is quite out of place. It is actually reducing the sense of place instead of enhancing it. In contrast to this building the lower two buildings make a very positive contribution to the appeal of Franschhoek. Although it might be more difficult to find suitable buildings for housing filling stations in towns such as Franschhoek than is the case with other enterprises, the petroleum industry may still be able to make a significant contribution to the unique character of certain towns by following such an approach.

## Banners as Service Facility Signs?

The large variety of banners available on the market today, together with their affordability and the ease with which they may be erected, has led to a substantial increase in the use of this outdoor advertising medium, especially with regard to filling stations and roadside service areas. Together with the format and the size of some of these banners this issue now poses a serious problem with regard to visual pollution and traffic safety. With this in mind a reconsideration of the role of banners at filling stations and roadside service areas may be necessary. Should banners still be used at all? If it is still allowed what should its role be? Should it only fulfil a secondary role or a primary role as well?



On the other hand certain banner formats have a definite appeal and if applied correctly it can make a positive contribution to streetscapes and the visual environment in general. A great deal of any banner's appeal is its ability to flutter in the wind. However, too much movement may create a negative effect instead, which is the problem with the tall banners in the top image. Due to flexible supports they are tilting in every which way and present quite an untidy appearance. This effect is enhanced by an excess of additional visual objects such as lamp poles, traffic signs and other advertising structures. It is also clear that these three banners contribute to a traffic safety problem by partly obscuring the filling station's exit from oncoming traffic and vice versa. This problem is increased by the lateral movement of the banners. Banners not securely anchored may create an additional traffic safety problem by being blown in front of passing traffic by strong winds. The *Wild Bean* sign below seems to be only anchored by a few bricks.



The *Postnet* and *Wild Bean* banners to the left provide a good example of untidiness that is not beneficial to the aesthetic environment.

## Banners as Service Facility Signs?



By making use of existing street poles there is no need for additional advertising structures which may result in an over-complicated visual environment. If banners should be allowed as primary signs attracting customers to filling stations street poles seem to be the solution. Banners against street poles may even be considered some way up and down a filling station entrance.



A pleasant rhythmic effect is obtained by attaching banners to more rigid structures. If not stretched to tightly it may still allow for the desirable banner fluttering movement, while all advertising messages may be read effortlessly.



Street poles have a huge potential for displaying banners. Such banners create a festive atmosphere and harmonise with the prominent vertical lines of the poles which is definitely not the case with street pole posters ([Class 2b](#)). These banners may even be used to soften the harsh visual effect of street poles.

Compiled by  
Frans Jordaan