

Class 1a ~ Super billboards

Super Billboards were originally provided in SAMOAC (April 1998) in order to have a sign class making provision for exceptionally large billboards of up to 81m². In the meantime certain municipalities have also allowed *Gantry billboards* (36 m² – 81 m²), which were not originally provided for, but which has now been included in the Draft Revised SAMOAC (July 2008) as Class 1b. However, the question may be asked whether there is really a need for two sign classes of up to 81 m²? Should one of them not be omitted in the final updated SAMOAC? On the other hand, since *Super Billboards* will be the only billboard class according to the Draft Revised SAMOAC (July 2008) that will allow digital or electronic (LED) messages aimed at the motorist, one can assume that the outdoor advertising industry will have a definite need for this sign class. Another solution might be to allow both classes, but to allow only a limited number of *Super billboards* and *Gantry billboards* added together.

The sheer size and height of *Super billboards* imply a large impact on the aesthetic environment. Due to the same reasons higher safety risks may also become an issue when these billboards are subjected to strong winds. Due to the high visual impact of *Super Billboards* it is only allowed in the metropolitan areas¹ of South Africa according to the Draft Revised SAMOAC (July 2008). The reasoning behind this limitation is that the visual environment in smaller urban areas and towns might be overwhelmed by such structures.

Animated *Super Billboards* and especially digital or electronic (LED) billboards, might have a high traffic safety impact and this aspect should be considered carefully in any SEA. Currently there is a huge debate going on in the USA regarding electronic billboards and traffic safety. Important research is currently being done on this topic. The results of a major study by the Federal Highway Administration will only be available at the end of 2009. A sensible approach might therefore be to place a moratorium on the approval of electronic billboards until the results of this study have become available.

Electronic billboards also have a large impact on the environment in terms of aesthetics, light pollution and a relatively high demand for electricity.

Due to the high costs of *Super Billboard* structures the outdoor advertising industry is of the opinion that controlling authorities should grant approval for *Super Billboards*

¹ City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality
City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality
City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality
Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality
Ethekewini Metropolitan Municipality
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality

for a **minimum** period of 5 years with a 5 year automatic renewal option. However, a minimum period of 5 years actually leaves the door open for an unlimited period of display. A maximum period of display will therefore have to be considered. It may also be argued that Super Billboards generate very high incomes which make adequate provision for structure-costs. At the moment the Draft Revised SAMOAC (July 2008) tries to find a compromise by stating: 'The relevant controlling authority will at its discretion grant approval for a limited period only, with a **maximum** of 5 years and with a 5 year renewal option on the same or on a similar site depending on the findings of a revised SEA.'

No Super Billboard will be allowed within a road reserve or above any roadway.



Super Billboards from Ad Outpost Africa

9mx6m (54m²)



12mx9m (108m²)



5mx20m (100m²)

The two lower billboards are larger than the 81m² that is currently allowed by the Draft Revised SAMOAC (July 2008). The traditional look of the lowermost billboard (large billboard with dominant horizontal lines on a long and slender pole) makes it visually intrusive and dominant. The square format of the middle billboard on a solid and more artistic pole is more attractive.



Clear Channel UK's Mega 96 (18,3m x 4,6m) billboards. Its 84,18 m² comes closer to SAMOAC's maximum of 81m² while its lower height makes it more environmental friendly and less susceptible to wind damage. It fits even better into the environment when placed behind hedges or fences which conceals most of any unappealing supporting structures. The billboard in the central image is quite 'eye-catching' and may cause a traffic safety problem when placed along highways. Indecency might also be a bit of a problem.

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

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This elongated super billboard from *Clear Channel UK*, which reaches to the ground, is more appealing than the average super billboard (top right). However, its backside might not be all that appealing while its provoking contents might pose a bit of a traffic safety and decency problem.

Better looking super billboards from *JC Decaux* (top & bottom left). The aesthetic impact of height and structure has been overcome by appealing and even artistic elongated billboard structures that reach to the ground with advertising panels that do not overwhelm the structure but rather form an integral and pleasant part of it. Although the actual panels may be smaller than 81m² the whole structure can be seen as an advertising panel due to the visual integration of advertising contents and structure. In this case such advertising contents will be more effective than the normal and larger super billboard panels since the audience's attention is drawn to the advertising messages by means of the pleasant-looking structure.

Since these structures may be seen as objects of urban architecture, one may seriously consider the involvement of architects in designing billboard structures. If different structures can be 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.



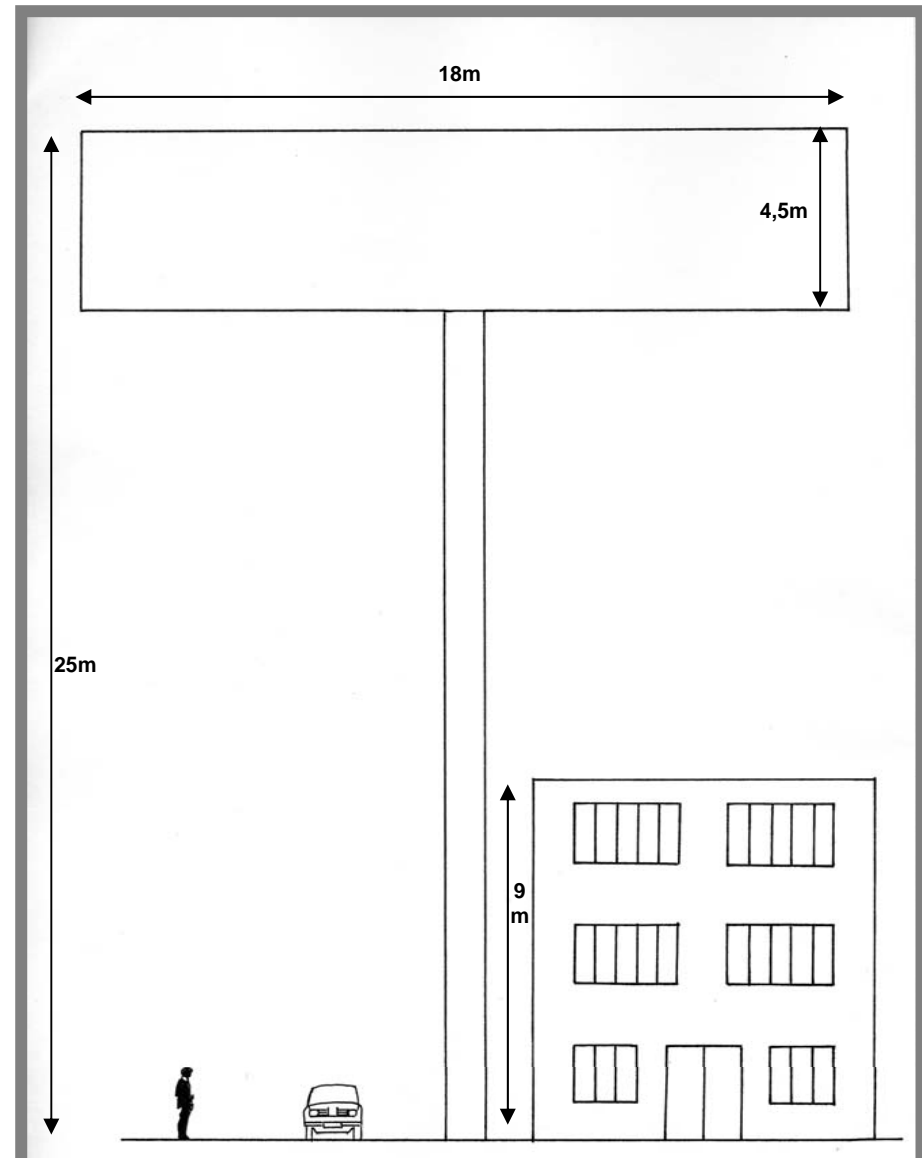
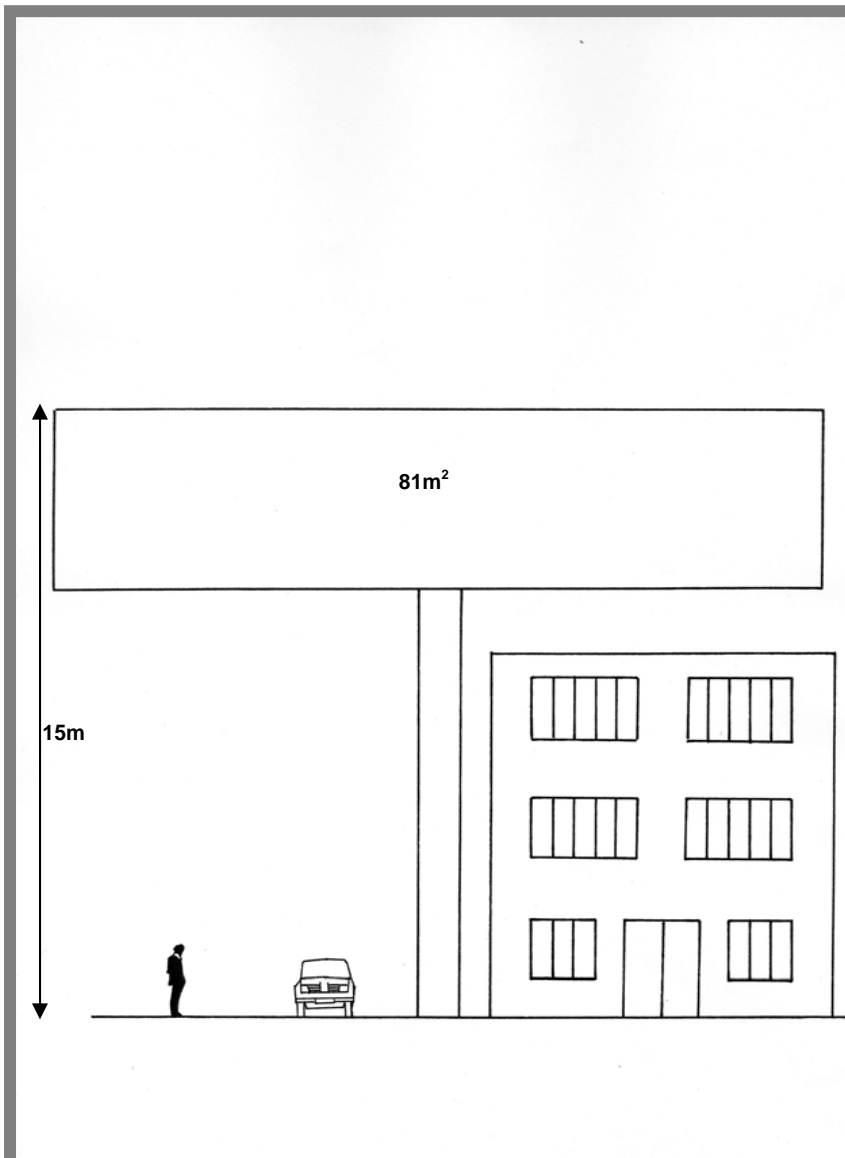
Although this super billboard is also very overwhelming in terms of size and height it may be more acceptable to the needs and aesthetic values of the community in which it is situated.

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



Although this super billboard is situated in an industrial area it is still very overwhelming in terms of size and height.

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



The Draft Revised SAMOAC allows a maximum height of 15 metre for Super billboards which is somewhat higher than a 3-storey building (left). In comparison a maximum height of 25 metre seems quite over-powering and dominating (right). Apart from visual impacts a restriction of height is also necessary due to the safety risk factor as a result of an increase of wind velocity with an increase in height.