

1.08 SIGNAGE PHILOSOPHY

Sign program design, wayfinding, and communications consistency have become critical issues at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (STIA). Over the past 25 years the airport has grown to be the leading air transportation hub of the Pacific Northwest and a primary international gateway to Asia and the Pacific Rim. As is typical of large international airports, STIA has been challenged to provide an ever increasing amount of wayfinding information to the traveling public through its signage program and associated print media. Signage and communications have become even more important with the introduction of the STEP Project and other planned future expansions to the airport, as well as connection to regional transportation.

We have commissioned the STIA Signage Standards Manual in order to provide a useful and effective tool for STIA managers, project managers, airline station managers and design consultants associated with airport expansion projects. Most importantly it documents the thinking behind the design of the signage and wayfinding program. The standards include design philosophy, design criteria, and a detailed description through text and illustrations of each signage element in the program.

The ultimate purpose of this document is to assure that visual design and communication principles of the program are faithfully recorded, providing STIA project and program managers with a ready reference and authoritative guide for the ongoing implementation and expansion of the signage and wayfinding program. Most importantly it is meant to improve the traveling public's experience during visits to STIA.

THE CONCEPT OF WAYFINDING

The term "wayfinding" will be used frequently throughout this document. It is important to understand what wayfinding is and is not. Wayfinding is not simply signs, but instead the combination of three equally important elements:

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|--------------|--------------------|
| Architecture | (the place) |
| People | (the spoken word) |
| Signs | (the written word) |

Architecture, people, and signs work together, providing the information necessary for people to find their way from a point of origin to a point of destination within complex architectural environments. When any one of these elements is not doing its part, an imbalance is created which puts undue pressure on the other two components to successfully provide wayfinding information.

This document deals exclusively with the design and content of signs. It is also important to remember that clarity in architecture as well as accuracy and consistency in staff-to-public communications are equally important.

THE ANATOMY OF WAYFINDING

A wayfinding program is not only signs. A wayfinding program is a careful and considered orchestration of the design of the built environment, clear and consistent direction given by staff, and clear and consistent signs. This section deals with the design principles that apply to each of the three components of wayfinding: Architecture, people and signs. These principles are central to the design of a fully functioning wayfinding program.

The ultimate success of the wayfinding program depends on the balanced application of these new designs in the real world environment of STIA. As stated earlier, if one element is neglected at the expense of the others, the overall success of the wayfinding program will be compromised.

ARCHITECTURE

When an architectural environment is easy for a person to understand and negotiate there is a resulting reduction in the need for signs and person-to-person assistance within that environment. Navigating through a well-designed building is an effortless and rewarding experience. Unfortunately, few airport terminals are self-evident. Consideration of security, operations, airline requirements, interface with existing terminal structures and a score of other issues conspire against fundamental architectural design principals. This is especially true of airports that have been added to over time. These facilities can be maze-like, making getting lost in and around them all too easy.

Visual accessibility, or ease of viewing, is a central design criterion in terms of wayfinding in the built environment. Building entrances, information desks, primary destinations, food services, airline counters, and restrooms are high priority destinations and should be readily seen and accessed. Buildings in which people can find these high priority destinations with the least amount of effort must:

- Have spaces and visual elements that are organized in a predictable manner.
- Contain visually accessible and architecturally differentiated wayfinding features that identify:

Entrances

Information

Stairs

Primary Destinations

Elevators & Escalators

Exits

ARCHITECTURE

- Have architectural wayfinding features that are consistent in placement and appearance, allowing people to anticipate what to look for.
- Have spaces that clearly communicate who has access: the public, passengers, or staff only.
- Contain clearly defined architectural pathways. Have spaces and architectural elements that serve as wayfinding landmarks.

If these requirements are met in the building design, wayfinding problems will be minor in nature. The building and its spaces will promote efficient circulation and reduce the need for signs and personal assistance.

PEOPLE A wayfinding program must include, as an integral component, staff as information providers. Architecture guides people non-verbally and signs mark the way. People are also a component of wayfinding, providing consistent and clear oral directions. In order for these oral directions to be useful they must take advantage of architectural wayfinding devices such as landmarks, building nodes, color features, etc. Oral directions must also be consistent with written directions and technology provided through signing and print materials.

In order to accomplish these objectives, STIA staff must be provided with orientation and training in how to utilize architecture and signing when they provide directions to passengers and visitors. This training must include a real time orientation to the architectural environment during which the terminals are toured and specific architectural features with relevance to the wayfinding program are pointed out and explained. Staff must also be trained to understand, accept, and integrate knowledge of the built environment into their own direction giving. Most importantly staff must understand that the sign program is a critical part of wayfinding and that their oral directions must be consistent with information on signs.

STIA staff involvement in this program does not stop with giving directions. The maintenance and upkeep of the signage and printed handouts require a carefully orchestrated effort and effective management of the wayfinding program.

SIGNS

Signs are intended to clearly mark circulation pathways when those pathways are obscured by confusing architectural space and cannot intuitively be followed. Signs may be thought of as the “trail of crumbs” which confirm one’s progress from a point of origin to a point of destination. When buildings are complicated and confusing, more signs are necessary in order to make up for deficiencies in building architecture. Putting more signs up without being careful about what they look like, what they say and where they are placed only compounds wayfinding problems. It is important to note that, with or without clarity in signing, signs will generally exist. The objective here is to establish clarity, logic, and understanding for and in the public and, particularly, in the passengers.

Organization of information and consistency and strength of presentation are far more effective in solving sign design problems than any other approach. This concept will be demonstrated throughout the ensuing sections of this document.

Applications of wayfinding principles will assure a general reduction in the number of signs while increasing ease of use within the airport. While visual appeal is important, it must be in balance with issues of functionality.

Signs are also an extension of the STIA identity (what we look like) and therefore are a direct communicator of image (who we are). When information is inaccurate, when signs are confusing and disorganized, people are given the impression that STIA and the airport community are inaccurate and disorganized. Obviously design is going to project a positive image for STIA.

WAYFINDING AT STIA

The wayfinding program for STIA is a synthesis of improved architectural elements, consistent signage and wording, consistent communication by personnel, and a broader support system of printed information and maps.

This signage program is multi-layered, in that it consists of several categories of information developed to work in combination, providing effective directional orientation for passengers, visitors, and staff. The information levels are structured to provide orientation to:

1. Cardinal directions (north, east, south and west)
2. Buildings and parking (North Satellite, South Satellite, Main Terminal, Concourses, etc.)
3. Major terminal entrances (at all levels)
4. Airport information services (staff and airline assistance)
5. Primary airport destinations (gates, baggage claim, ground transportation, etc.)
6. Services (information, lost & found, security, etc.)
7. Orientation to individual rooms (all other airport functions, airline services, and POS facilities.)

The multiple levels of information listed on the previous page, are distributed throughout the wayfinding program within the three basic components of the Wayfinding Triad as follows:

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Architecture | (spatial directions) |
| People | (oral directions and information) |
| Signs | (written directions and information) |

Buildings convey information through their organization; people convey information by the spoken word; signs convey information through a literal marking of pathways and presentation of symbols and messages and are the most direct of the three. The concepts described in this section are most literally described through the sign program. Conveying information through architecture is abstract at best, and oral directions can be inconsistent despite the best of training and personal intentions. In reality, signs generally bear the burden of providing information.

The remaining guidelines contain a series of detailed drawings and diagrams that illustrate the design of the signage components of the wayfinding program. Included are designs for curbside terminal identification, new directory maps, and a new hierarchy of sign types for use at STIA. Also included are a series of illustrations of typefaces, sign face grid diagrams, sign face layouts and typical sign placement elevations. Design guidelines for handout materials are not included.

The ultimate success of the wayfinding program depends on the balanced application of these new designs in the real world environment of STIA. As stated earlier, if one element is neglected at the expense of the others the overall success of the wayfinding program will be compromised.

WAYFINDING DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION RULES

When the criteria discussed in the preceding pages are observed in developing signing there is a much greater likelihood of program success. In addition to these basic design criteria, the following six primary rules should be observed.

RULE NUMBER ONE

Follow established protocols.

The first impulse when dealing with signage and wayfinding problems is to over-design the solution. However, signage solutions are deceptively simple, yet no one will believe how simple these solutions can be. Always ask the question: “Do we really need this sign?” If the answer is “yes,” then the following criteria for sign procurement must be met.

1. There must be an obvious need for the sign.
2. No permanent sign will be approved for construction until a temporary sign has been tested in the proposed location and with the proposed text.
3. No signs will be fabricated or installed without a signed sign construction authorization form.
4. All proposed text must be reviewed and approved by the Manager of Signage and Graphics.
5. All messages must be consistent and be derived from the approved terminology STIA Sign Nomenclature list included in this document.

RULE NUMBER TWO

WAYFINDING DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION RULES

Always follow the established STIA sign hierarchy.

- A. Directional
- B. Destination Identification
- C. Information
- D. Airport Regulatory
- E. ADA, Building and Fire Code-Required
- F. Traffic Regulatory (N.I.C.)
- G. Hazard Warnings and Markings (N.I.C.)
- H. Airfield (N.I.C.)

The success or failure of a sign program depends on how well organized the information is. The signage hierarchy represents the basis for the rational organization of information which, is to be displayed on the signs. The basic hierarchy of Directional, Identification, Information, and Regulatory signs must not be altered. Also the content of different sign types must never be intermixed (i.e., directional messages should not appear on information signs).

RULE NUMBER THREE

Never use more signs than absolutely necessary.

Always carefully analyze the need for signs. This includes looking at location, content, and size before committing to construction of mock-ups or permanent signs. If an existing or newly installed sign is not performing to expectation do not install a second sign before understanding why the first is not working.

WAYFINDING DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION RULES

Placement and clarity of content rather than quantity determines the success of any sign program. Very often when a sign is not performing as expected another sign will be added creating visual clutter and over-signing, reducing the effectiveness of the system. The preferred solution is to relocate the original sign to a more visible location, revise its content to communicate more clearly, or both of these options.

RULE NUMBER FOUR

Never provide more information than is absolutely needed.

Signing programs often fail because they provide too much or incorrect information, locate signs in the wrong place, or have information that is not clearly organized and structured. If too much information is placed on a single sign, people will not read it. If they take the time to read a complex sign, they will have a difficult time sorting out the information and have even more difficulty remembering it.

For example, if a sign is intended to direct an individual to C Gates from A Gates, don't include C Gates airlines and secondary destinations on every sign along the information pathway. All that is needed is a sign that directs to the general destination. As the user nears the destination additional information may be presented, as it becomes relevant. All of the secondary destinations within C Gates are only needed at the entry to C Gates.

Another example of providing more information than is absolutely necessary is directories. Often very detailed architectural plans of buildings or complex “exploded” perspective views are displayed as directory maps intended for general public use. The difficulty is that these plans provide far more information about the architectural layout and design of buildings than the destinations within them. Also a significant portion of the public cannot easily read plans or “exploded” views. Three-dimensional views are confusing and should be avoided.

Directory plans must be simplified schematics of the building and clearly illustrate circulation pathways to major destinations and significant orientation landmarks only. (See sample directory layouts for details). Also the plans must be rotated to coincide with their location relative to north, east, south, and west, within the building. Orientation to direction is not to provide compass orientation but to keep the plan and building in the correct relationship, allowing individuals to easily correlate between the two-dimensional plan and where they stand within the real three-dimensional terminal.

RULE NUMBER FIVE

Always be consistent and clear with sign messages.

The names of destinations and services should be used consistently throughout the signing program. Do not refer to Bag Claim on one sign and Baggage Claim on the next. Only names that have high public recognition value should be used. Avoid terminology like Airside and Landside. Also terms like Concourse

WAYFINDING DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION RULES

or Satellite as a designation for groups of gates should be avoided, as this terminology tends to create confusion for international travelers. Approved Nomenclature is described in Section 2.07.

RULE NUMBER SIX

Always maintain visual consistency.

The sign program is the "voice" of STIA in the absence of direct staff assistance or recorded messages. Signs are a major carrier of the public image and corporate identity of the airport. For this reason signs must present a uniform visual image, one that is compatible with the standards set forth in this document and the STIA identity standards. Some variation is acceptable, if approved by the Manager of Signage and Graphics, as long as a "family look" is maintained throughout all terminal areas. This can be achieved through consistent use of typography, symbols, nomenclature, and color.

Inconsistency compromises the credibility of the sign program and STIA. This leads to an increase in public criticism, staff interruption by passengers and visitors, and a resulting loss of staff efficiency. Worse, it leads to public frustration, dissatisfaction, and negative impression of their visit to STIA. If the signs misinform and misdirect, the passenger is left with the impression that STIA does not care about its visitors.

It is often thought that more signs are necessary in order to make up for complexities in building architecture. Installing signs without being careful about what they look like, what they say, and where they are placed typically compounds wayfinding problems.

SIGN DESIGN CRITERIA

Organization of information and consistency and strength of presentation are more effective in solving sign design problems than any other strategy. Successful signage and wayfinding programs are based upon the previously identified rules.