

1.09 EVALUATING SIGNAGE NEEDS

As discussed in Section 3, a sign is not always the answer to a wayfinding issue. To that end, all new signage is subject to a review process. The highly subjective nature of signage issues prohibits a “connect-the-dots” formula that will produce a solution for each case. Therefore, the final decision in each case rests with the Manager of Signage and Graphics. This process has five stages:

1. Identifying issues
2. Evaluating possible methods of addressing the issues
3. Temporary signage trial
4. Evaluation of trial
5. Installation of permanent signage

Each stage has an approval component as described in Section 1.06 and the process may be terminated at any time.

IDENTIFYING ISSUES

Signage issues come to light in many ways. The SDRC is tasked with keeping ahead of potential problems, but invariably, problems arise. Most are initiated by our base customer, the passengers, and are translated to staff members, eventually finding their way to the SDRC. Once identified, perceived problems are to be evaluated by the SDRC according to the following criteria:

1. Are there a number of complaints? Are many people having difficulty in a different area or has one person determined on their own that the signage does not work?
2. Who is complaining? Is the motivation for the complaint justified, or is it put forth to solve some other problem (i.e., lack of staff)?
3. Has the situation recently been altered? Is there some factor that has come into play to make the situation more difficult?

The answers to these questions will determine if the wayfinding issue is substantive, therefore requiring a solution. If the answer is yes, it is time to come up with some potential solutions.

EVALUATING AND ADDRESSING WAYFINDING ISSUES

Signs often appear to be the easiest way to solve a wayfinding issue, but this is not always the case. The two other components in the Wayfinding Triad must also be considered as possible solutions. Even when it has been decided that signage is the way to go, a new sign, or a larger one, is not necessarily what is required. In many cases a sign already exists. Before another is added, consider the following:

1. Is the location of the existing sign part of the problem?
2. Is the message on the existing sign appropriate for the situation?
3. Is there too much information on the existing sign?
4. Can the new information that is to be added be combined with other signs in the area to create one comprehensive sign?
5. Is the current sign so large and overwhelming that people are unable to see it?
6. Is it too obvious?

When possible, all of these questions must be examined and answered. The undesirable alternative is a patchwork of individual signs, each created to solve a different problem. The ability to do this is always dictated by available funds, but in the long run, solving the problem properly is always the best course of action.

TEMPORARY SIGNAGE TRIAL

Where the solution to a wayfinding dilemma is an expensive illuminated sign, a temporary signage trial is essential. There are too many variables to draft signage solutions purely on paper. Once fabricated, illuminated signs are expensive to change. This can be avoided by installing inexpensive temporary signs for a period of time to test location, messages, sizes, etc.

The feedback received with respect to a trial sign is invaluable. If people have strong negative opinions about a new sign, they will be heard. What is more difficult is gaining favorable opinions. Asking people what they think of a sign instantly biases their opinion, as there are many subliminal factors that are at play. However, these opinions will be received, and it is the job of the Manager of Signage and Graphics to judge their merit. In many cases the best way to judge a sign is to watch people using the sign and how they react to it. Passengers who glance at a sign, then move off in a confident manner have been helped. Those who glance at the sign several times and walk in circles require more. When doing this evaluation it is essential to keep in mind the other two components of the Wayfinding Triad and the fact that you will never satisfy the entire passenger population.

The final step to many wayfinding problems is the installation of permanent signage. Permanent signage can be defined as any sign for which there are no plans to replace. These signs should conform to the visual and material standards laid out in this manual.

INSTALLATION OF PERMANENT SIGNAGE